

Parents and teachers talking: A 'community of practice'?

Relationships between parents and teachers
of children with special educational needs

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Abstract

Viewing parents as partners within education is enshrined in legislation. Using dyadic case studies of parents and teachers, jointly involved with children "giving cause for concern", this thesis shows that relationships between parents and teachers, when involved in a collective social practice of a potentially conflictual and contradictory nature, are characterised by diverse agendas, expectations and priorities. In these cases, the parent-teacher interface functions as a critical meeting ground for dialogue and as a lens through which to view the dynamics of mutuality and reciprocity.

Wenger's concept of the 'community of practice', deployed as an 'ideal model', functions as a template for examining parent-teacher relationships within a social theory of learning which sees learning as an expression of social participation. Membership of a 'community of practice' implies collaborative mutual engagement in a joint project where meaning and strategies are constructed through negotiation and where participation increases whilst exclusionary processes decrease. The research reveals a spectrum of non-linear relationships subject to differences in socio-economic status, gender, personality, situation, motivation and context. Given the non-linear nature of relationships, and the need for liaison and negotiation of meanings, can this theory, with its social rather than didactic approach to problem-solving, contribute to the improvement of school and teacher-parent focused educational decision-making situations which affect children's life chances?

Schools are potential sites for shared practice. However despite the legislation and the rhetoric, many schools lack effective mechanisms and resources for facilitating the active participation of parents and children. This thesis explores themes in relation to linking special educational needs, parent-teacher relationships and the 'duty of care' to the 'community of practice' theory. It draws attention to implications for the construction of effective parent-teacher partnerships grounded in a broad conceptualisation of inclusion and democratic decision-making processes.

Statement of Authenticity

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work in this thesis is entirely my own.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 The Judgement

'£45.000 PAYOUT FOR GIRL WHO CAN'T SPELL'

Evening Standard, 23rd September 1997.

These were the front-page headlines heralding a landmark ruling which made educational and legal history. In 1995, the House of Lords gave judgement in three test cases (known as *E v Dorset County Council and Others*). The Court established that educational psychologists, teachers and similar staff could be held liable for negligence to the children for whom they were responsible. On the 23rd September 1997, the first substantive education negligence case was decided. On the 4th November 1998, the Court of Appeal reversed the judgement after an appeal by the Local Education Authority. On the 27th July 2000, the House of Lords reversed the decision of the Court of Appeal and upheld the original judgement.

The Education Act 1944 developed the system of public education established by statutes in 1870. Section 34 (1) of the Act imposed a duty on Local Education Authorities to ascertain which children in their area required special educational provision. Section 36 of the Act imposed on the parent of every child the duty 'to cause him to receive efficient full-time education suitable for his age, ability, and aptitude, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise'.

The question which faced the judges was whether educational professionals were under a duty of care to their pupils when advising on their educational needs. No previous case existed where a school or teachers had been held liable for negligent advice relating to the educational needs of a pupil. Indeed, prior to 1995, cases for negligent failure to provide appropriate education were not thought possible. The lengthy judgement linked the duty of care to the giving of advice. This acknowledged that parents rely and act upon professional findings, recommendations and advice. In a broad sense, parents are expected to act upon the advice they receive. As agents for their children, they make informed choices or accept school decisions concerning the pupil's education. Teachers and educational psychologists need to foresee that advice

communicated to parents will be relied upon. An educational psychologist, for example, by giving advice, owes a duty of care to a child through its parents. Teachers owe a duty of care to the child to exercise both skill and care. For in the words of Lord Browne-Wilkinson:

If it comes to the attention of the headmaster that a pupil is underperforming, he owes a duty to take such steps as a reasonable teacher would consider appropriate to try to deal with such underperformance. To hold that in such circumstances the head teacher could properly ignore the matter and make no attempt to deal with it would fly in the face not only of society's expectations of what a school will provide, but also of the fine tradition of the teaching profession itself. If such head teacher gives advice to the parents, then in my judgement he must exercise the skills and care of a reasonable teacher in giving such advice.

What follows is a summary of the case with extracts from the judgement. The plaintiff, Pamela, sued the LEA for failing to identify her as having a special learning difficulty and failing to take appropriate remedial steps. Pamela argued that had such steps been taken 'she would have made greater progress at school, achieved a substantially higher level of literacy than she now enjoys, and that her prospects of congenial and remunerative employment would have been correspondingly increased'.

Pamela was first seen by an educational psychologist two years after starting school. After a meeting with Pamela's parents, the educational psychologist thought there might be problems at home. However, a written note reveals that she 'made factual errors about the family'. These errors lead to a referral to the Child Guidance Clinic (CGC), and to a psychiatric social worker. A memorandum written by the Director of the CGC, when Pamela was just 7 years old, contained these words:

Listening to her talk is like watching a leaf turning over in the eddies of a stream, pulled this way and that by submerged invisible currents of the unconscious in the deflecting pathways of her thoughts...

Equally eloquent was his report to the family's general practitioner which included the following:

On her own with me the little girl presents a superficially innocuous picture of superficial and irrelevant chatter all amounting to, as it were,

nothing, but it seems to me really a kind of whistling in the dark to stave off painful feelings, and I should add, of course, that the pattern of her failures in learning are those that go with unhappiness or emotional difficulty.

Pamela began to see a psychotherapist, who, for various reasons, missed some 10 weekly sessions. Pamela's parents 'became impatient with this, with an apparent lack of progress, and the fact that each session meant that the Plaintiff missed a morning at school'. They decided to discontinue the psychotherapy. The Director of the CGC wrote to the family's General Practitioner effectively blaming Pamela's parents for her difficulties. He regarded their conduct as confirmation of his original assessment of her problem. The psychotherapist's closing report re-echoed this assumption:

...my feeling was when I was with her that there was not too much 'wrong' with her, given the family in which she finds herself.

The next meeting between Pamela's parents and the Director of the CGC was described as 'an unhappy occasion'. Pamela's father described him as 'non-committal and unhelpful' and he, in a memorandum, described the parents as 'hostile and uncooperative'. There were many discussions between educational professionals and Pamela's parents about what could be done to help her. Throughout, her parents expressed their anxiety and concern. There was no evidence that Pamela's parents would not have done their best for her had they been correctly advised. Had they have been told their rights under the 1981 Act they would have been made aware of the options and choices available to them.

After transferring to secondary school Pamela was seen by another educational psychologist. Aged 11 years and 9 months, she was unable to write her address correctly and had a reading age of 7.3 years. Before producing her report, the educational psychologist read the original (and inaccurate) reports in the CGC files with their strongly expressed views on emotional difficulties. Pamela's parents continued to be 'quite naturally, extremely worried' by her lack of educational progress and raised the issue of transferring Pamela to a special school. The judge notes that Pamela's parents were 'clearly desperate' about their daughter's lack of progress.

Pamela's 'remarkable continued under-performance', her limited ability to write coupled with a range of test results should have demanded further investigation. Ascribing Pamela's difficulties to emotional difficulties culled from reports in a file was more than an error of judgement. It led to professional collusion in a myth which relied unquestioningly upon 'a number of things said and done'. Apparent indicators of an unhappy state of affairs at home were repeated so often as to assume the status of established fact. This myth, which erroneously located the basis of Pamela's difficulties within the family relationships, effectively robbed both Pamela and her parents of "voice". Pamela left school in April 1990, shortly after her dyslexia 'had at last been diagnosed' by a clinical and educational psychologist at the Dyslexia Institute. His report showed that, aged 16, Pamela's spelling and reading ages were below that of the average 8-year-old.

It was at this point that I met Pamela when she asked for my help with her educational difficulties. This was the beginning of a relationship which spanned several years, involved the court cases outlined above and led, ultimately, to the headlines '£45.000 PAYOUT FOR GIRL WHO CAN'T SPELL'. This thesis is both more and less than the personal journey which I embarked upon as I began working with Pamela.

1.2 My research

The judgement handed down on the 23rd September 1997 highlighted many issues which have long exercised my thoughts. Linking the duty of care to the giving of advice is a new and significant departure and one with consequences for the construction of effective parent-teacher partnerships. It draws into focus how conceptualisations of special educational needs, and the dynamics of interactions between environments, can impact upon a child's progress through school.

Educational researchers have sought for a long time to better understand the relationship between educational achievement and social background. Over a long period of time special educational needs had been conceptualised:

...in terms of a dynamic interaction between the individual child and the various environments in which the child is living and learning. But we still understand very little about the nature of that interaction, far less how the quality of the interaction could be enhanced to benefit children [...]. We

now look for ways in which schools can create or complicate learning difficulties and as a corollary, how schools might prevent such difficulties occurring in the first place (Mittler, 1999, p.3).

The prevention of learning difficulties is likely to feature high on the wish list of most parents. Although my own aims are less ambitious they are arguably more realistic. My pursuit is the enhancement of education and, thereafter, the life chances for children who struggle at school. It is this endeavor which motivates both my work and this thesis.

My journey began by asking some of the parents of children I worked with to write their stories and to raise issues which were of concern to them. I also sent a questionnaire to schools which provided me with some insight into teachers' understandings of "special educational needs". Although neither of these tentative approaches are reported in any detail in this thesis they were both instrumental to the formulation of my original research questions. My method of working with children involves close relationships with their families so parental worries and concerns are familiar territory to me. My situation as someone working ostensibly "outside of the system" meant that my access to teachers' viewpoints was less easily acquired and often only arrived at after considerable formal arrangements had been made.

I have always been conscious that my understandings of the relationships between parents, teachers and children could easily be biased by the ready access I have to parents and children and by my limited access to their teachers. On becoming a doctoral student I had access to a library full of texts relating to teachers' lives, beliefs, practices and much more. These I devoured voraciously and wrote reams on my newly discovered understanding of the nature of teacher professionalism. I sought to better understand the discourses which underpinned teachers' practices and the problems which might beset them. This too has fed into the formulation of my research questions and the subsequent research design.

Throughout my doctoral studies I have continued working in an independent capacity with children giving cause for concern at school and their families. The reduction in time for writing the thesis is compensated for by the advantage of maintaining a "bi-focal" perspective throughout my research. "Doing a Ph.D."

has involved me in an in-depth immersion in a wide range of academic discourses previously unknown to me. My academic background is in the field of Fine Art. As an undergraduate, my involvement in creative projects working with children with Downs Syndrome and Autism led me to develop a creative approach to communicating with children. This still underpins much of my work today, although the range now extends to include children with a wide range of problems as well as adults. Studying for a Ph.D. has necessitated a sharp learning curve but one which knits together my practitioner experience with conceptual understanding. The process is a recursive one whereby my increasing understanding of academic texts is continually measured against my work which brings me into daily contact with children and young people like Pamela. Some theories and philosophies sit uneasily alongside my own experiences whilst others resonate in a confirmatory way. However, in my search for a way forward, I have not simply abandoned the former in favour of the latter. In developing the thesis, the empirical data remains the arbiter of influence upon my choice of theoretical frameworks, analysis and conclusions.

The legal judgement with which this thesis opens establishes that the giving of advice to parents is part of a teacher's duty of care. One of the main theories informing this thesis is a concept of social practice, developed by Lave and Wenger, which they call 'legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991). This involves learning how to talk (and be silent) in the manner of full participants and makes a distinction between talking within and talking about a practice (Adler, 1998, p.167). For teachers and educational professionals, talking within a practice might be signified by exchanging information about practice, whilst talking about might be teachers listening to parents talking about the child as they know him or her. Both talking about and talking within fulfil specific functions and contribute to meeting the educational needs of the child. The important point being, according to Lave and Wenger, that it is learning to talk, rather than learning from talk (as in a college lecture, for example) that is the key to participation. Verbal interactions between parents and teachers are one of a complex interrelation of factors which affect their relationships. Within this thesis, verbal interactions and advice-giving become the conceptual tools which link the duty of care to the 'community of practice' in

which language, or discourse, is a potential resource which can either facilitate or hinder participation.

1.3 Terminology

“Special educational needs” is the terminology generally employed in the literature and policy documents to describe children who have a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for them (Department for Education and Skills, 2001). This thesis examines and explores the relationships between parents and teachers working with children giving cause for concern at school. The accuracy or otherwise of a diagnosis of “special education needs” is not a key feature of this research. Neither are the problematics of labelling children, nor the range of definitions or debates surrounding the meaning and implications of the term “special” in relation to educational needs although these issues are addressed in the literature review. Learning difficulties can be, and often are, described as lying along a continuum with imprecise cut off points and/or definitions. Whilst many may speak a common language and share particular understandings of what they mean, there is no universally agreed consensus of definitions. The terminology which underpins discourses about special educational needs is not to be found in what Kuhn calls ‘normal science’ (Kuhn, 1962). The lack of specificity, agreed consensus of definition and standard keywords promote the argument that many of the terminologies used, particularly in relation to special education needs, might be better described as “understandings”.

The literature demonstrates that understandings of “special educational needs” are constructed from, and subjected to, contradictory conceptualisations. These range from the traditional psychological and medical models to the social interactionist view which sees disability as a social construction. Because of these various constructions, “children with special educational needs” is a contested and problematic terminology. This issue is discussed further in Chapter 2 below.

Irrespective of labelling, the children who are the subjects and objects of this research have all experienced difficulties at school. This is confirmed by descriptors given by both the parent and the child’s teacher (see section 4.6.3).

Whilst these descriptors help to furnish a more comprehensive representation of the whole child, (rather than highlighting specific weaknesses alone), it has nevertheless to be emphasised that the labelling of children is highly instrumental within the educational system. Labelling directly affects provision, and can indirectly affect teacher perceptions, attitudes and expectations towards certain children, most noticeably perhaps those considered to have emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) who are frequently described by teachers as “disruptive” a label which itself is entirely dependant upon a value judgement. “Children with special educational needs” and “concerned parents” do not represent absolute groups, since “concerns” and “difficulties” are variously constructed. For this reason, the terminologies “special educational needs”, “children giving cause for concern” and “children experiencing difficulties” are employed synonymously throughout my thesis, as are the terms “concerned parents” and “parents of a child with special educational needs”.

1.4 My questions

My initial research questions arise from my personal experience as a practitioner. I have enjoyed a lengthy career in education working initially as a lecturer within a college which was in the process of being accredited as part of a university. The college offered a range of educational opportunities from courses for functionally illiterate teenagers who had failed to benefit from their schooling through to degree courses for those with the appropriate qualifications. For the past 20 years I have worked in an independent capacity as a teacher and advisor to children and their families, and as a teacher of adults who feel they have “failed” or been failed by the education system. I have increasingly become concerned by the many parents and children I work with daily who feel that opportunities for effective education are missed because of less than satisfactory parent-teacher communications. These parents, highly motivated by their children’s difficulties and aware of the potential impact of educational difficulties upon future life chances, have actively sought alternative advice and information in order to supplement their children’s education. For the adults I work with whose life chances have been blighted, the help they can access often proves to be “too little too late”. My experiences of working in the field led to my

undertaking this research and locating it within primary education. My initial questions reflect areas which I wanted to better understand, namely:

- *Are individual parents' understandings of their child's problems/difficulties/special educational needs similar or different to those of their child's teachers?*
- *If the parental perceptions or understanding of a child's problems/difficulties/special educational needs differ from those of their child's teacher, does this influence the teacher's interpretation and management of the individual child's difficulties at primary school?*
- *If there are different understandings of the problems that individual children experience in primary school, (how) does this affect the relationship and dialogue between the child's parents and teachers?*
- *What are the kinds or forms of dynamics, for example, processes, procedures, events and relationships, inherent in the arriving (or not arriving) at agreement between parents and teachers in respect of the nature and management of individual children's difficulties at primary school?*
- *How do individual teachers and parents work together, or otherwise, in sorting out children's problems and difficulties?*
- *Assuming that both parents and teachers are involved in seeking "a way forward" in the management of children's difficulties, can additional advice, information, knowledge/expertise accumulated by parents from sources other than the school constitute a basis for negotiation?*

Whilst increasing numbers of children in England and Wales are being registered as having "special educational needs", policy documents continually affirm a commitment to improving the educational and pastoral provision for pupils giving cause for concern. This research takes into account developments whose impact upon relationships between home and school have yet to be fully explored, either empirically or conceptually. The duty of care judgement is one such example. A second example is the increasing availability and accessibility of information on offer to parents, partly attributable to the growth of the Internet and partly as a direct result of the increasing numbers of mothers being recruited

and employed in schools. The research explores dialogues between parents and teachers, dialogues which can be pivotal in the assessment and provision for children's learning needs. It explores the nature, relationship and status of the different yet complementary kinds of knowledge exchanged by parents and teachers in relation to children giving "cause for concern" at school.

The research explores how understandings of partnership are played out within primary schools. It identifies factors which motivate parental agency and the processes and procedures that both parents and teachers employ to make sense of children's difficulties. It explores how interactions between parents and teachers change as negotiations of meanings, an important factor in professional behaviour, are entered into as part of a process of attempting to reach a mutually agreed understanding of the nature and management of children's difficulties.

The parent-teacher interface functions as a critical meeting ground for dialogue exposing a range of problematics which constrain relationships between parents and teachers whilst impacting upon the education provision for the child giving cause for concern. Schools have the potential to be sites of shared practice wherein democratic decision-making processes are recognised as important elements and conditions of social justice (Young, 1990, p.10). Within such a framework, marginalisation and exclusion are inconsistent with human rights. A democratic society depends upon social participation and the sharing of narratives and experiences. A democracy 'is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience' (Dewey, 1961, p.87).

As the research progressed, and in response to the many complex problematics which emerged as characteristic of the parent-teacher interface, one over-arching meta-question surfaced:

- *Can partnerships between parents and teachers be (re)constituted or (re)constructed as 'communities of practice' with the potential to function as sites for the joint negotiation of both meaning and knowledge production in relation to problem solving?*

This question contains two interdependent dimensions which are addressed in this thesis. The first relates to the nature of parent-teacher relationships and the second to the addressing of children's educational needs. In order to answer the question I co-opt Wenger's account of the 'community of practice' as a theoretical model for participatory practice (Wenger, 1998). This provides a framework for describing sites of transformative and collaborative inquiry where all participants, considered equally as learners and potential beneficiaries, come together in a shared project and learn through the sharing of narratives. This thesis suggests that inclusion implies a whole school approach to social relations which values equally the knowledge and contributions of its parent, teacher and pupil members. The 'community of practice' has the potential to be a site within which discourse becomes more inclusive and less exclusive and participation increases whilst exclusionary pressures and processes decrease. The thesis explores whether practices constitutive of the 'community of practice', with its social rather than didactic approach to problem-solving, can contribute to decision-making situations which affect children's life chances. It seeks to examine both the possibilities for, and obstructions to, the realisation of problem solving educational practices through detailed analysis of several cases of parent-teacher negotiations around children giving cause for concern.

1.5 Abbreviations and writing conventions

A list of abbreviations and writing conventions are given in Appendix 1.

1.6 Outline of the thesis

The organisation of this thesis reflects the chronological order of the work. In Chapter 2, I review a panoply of factors which impact to a greater or lesser degree upon the establishing of partnerships between parents and teachers. My review of the literature begins with research into home-school links which is considered in relation to the school effectiveness literature. It continues with the effects upon teachers of the State's increasing control of education manifest in the rigid framework imposed by the National Curriculum, and looks at the relative responsibilities, roles, and rights of parents and teachers and at some alternative perspectives on parental agency. This is followed by a review of the extant literature on the conceptualisation and development of partnership as a core principle of SEN policy. The literature review then refers back to the National

Curriculum and considers the potential affect that differentiation and assessment play in the construction of some children as “different” or as having “special educational needs”. Finally the chapter reviews the lack of conceptual clarification and the contradicting and competing perspectives which have lead to an emergence of a “melange” of alternative special needs practices within an educational framework which attempts to balance ‘dilemmas of difference’ (Norwich, 1996, p.33). Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive overview of issues which contribute to contentious professional and lay dialogues. These issues, with their potentially destabilising effect upon parent-teacher partnerships, confirm the relevance of my own research questions.

Chapter 3 outlines the main sociological, conceptual and theoretical frameworks which underpin my analysis, findings and conclusions. The chapter begins with Giddens’s structuration theory, continues by referencing theories of ‘capital’ and ‘expert systems’, and considers power relationships with reference to the work of Foucault. The second section describes constructivism as a meta-theory in relation to Dewey’s theory of reflective thinking, and describes Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory of human development. The final section looks at social theories of learning and provides a detailed account of Wenger’s ‘community of practice’ theory which serves as a template for my analysis of parent- teacher relationships.

Having described how a review of the literature and sociological theories sharpened my conceptual framework, Chapter 4 details the methods and methodology deployed in this thesis. In this chapter I outline the methodological challenge, address the qualitative/quantitative divide and review the ethical considerations which arise. I discuss my decision to employ a participatory and dyadic approach within an interpretive, qualitative paradigm, using the semi-structured interview as a research instrument. The chapter includes a rationale for three important decisions which directly impact upon the research design. The first relates to the positioning of the children in the research, and the second to my decision to look at situations where children generate worries and concerns for their parents and teachers rather than at children designated as having “special educational needs”. The children themselves are introduced through descriptors given by their parents and teachers. The third rationale

relates to my adoption of Wenger's 'community of practice' theory as an 'ideal type'.

Chapter 5 is a short chapter which provides a context and agenda setting backcloth to the two empirical chapters which follow. The preliminary study, detailed in Chapter 6, establishes that, from the parental perspective, there are many constraining influences affecting relationships between parents and teachers. The Main Study, detailed in Chapter 7, opens with a section on parents' and teachers' ideal models of partnership which brings to the fore diverse understandings of mutual engagement, reciprocity and negotiated enterprise. This is followed by the dyadic case studies which illuminate parent-teacher narratives and dialogues. In Chapter 8, I present the findings of the research. I revisit my original research questions and the meta-question which evolved as the thesis developed (see section 1.4). The comparative analysis of the defining features of each dyadic case study reveals a spectrum of types of relationships which vary according to their potential to become transformed into, and sustain themselves as, forms of working partnerships consistent with Wenger's idealised model of a 'community of practice'. Chapter 9 outlines the contributions of the research, reviews the strengths and weaknesses of Wenger's 'community of practice' theory and considers it as a potential "mechanism for change" with implications for practice. The chapter concludes with a discussion about the limitations of the empirical work, proposals for future research, a reflection upon inclusion and a Post Script.

The limitations and contributions of the research, presented in Chapter 9, are briefly introduced here. The preliminary study is not limited in terms of location or the ages of the children, but the Main Study is geographically limited to the parents and teachers of primary aged children in one London Borough. The opportunistic nature of the sample does not lend itself to control for variations in gender, age, socio-economic status and ethnicity and the small size of the parent and teacher cohort places obvious limitations on its generalisability. The many contributions of this research to the existing knowledge base about home-school relations, parental involvement in schools and partnership issues relate to:

- how complex negotiations over power and identity impact upon parent-teacher relationships,
- how social developments, such as the increased employment of mothers in schools, affect the structure and dynamics of home-school relationships,
- how parents are potentially empowered by the increased availability and accessibility of information and the impact of this upon parent-teacher relationships,
- how the parent-teacher interface operates as a critical meeting ground for addressing the educational needs of children,
- the importance of the early identification of educational difficulties, not only to the children concerned but also to their parents who act as their agents in dialogues with teachers,
- unresolved tensions arising from competing and contradictory policy discourses and conceptual uncertainties particularly around the appropriateness or otherwise of the term “special educational needs”,
- schools as potential sites of shared practice with democratic decision-making processes,
- understandings of “inclusion”,
- the atypicality of individual parents, teachers and children,
- the motivation for parental agency,
- context and motivation as significant factors in the establishment of equitable partnerships,
- parent-teacher relationships as a complex mix of positive and negative features,
- the use of dyadic interviewing as an appropriate methodology.

The research reflects ‘the micro-politics, the messy specifications of particular situations, the challenges and idiosyncrasies of different schools each with their own history and ethos’ (Vincent and Tomlinson, 1997, p.368). It opens up a space in which to consider the role played by negotiation among people who not only may have different values, ideas and understandings of “what matters” and what is

considered desirable, but where several interests are at stake, including, most importantly, those of the child.

The establishment of equitable parent-teacher partnerships remains a very tense, and difficult to achieve area of educational practice. The research explores the complex problematics which relate to the rhetoric expressed in educational policy documents in relation to the establishment and maintenance of co-operative practices. Wenger's concept of the 'community of practice' is utilised as an analytical template for understanding the dynamics of partnership within a social theory of learning which sees learning as an expression of social participation. The research questions whether such a model, if and when established, can maximise the potential for addressing children's educational needs. Linking children's educational difficulties, the duty of care, parent-teacher relationships and the 'community of practice' theory is a new area of research not represented in the extant literature. This previously unexplored terrain produces new empirical findings which form the launch pad for a range of follow up studies. It provides an opportunity to widen the breadth and applicability of the 'community of practice' theory with potential implications for the construction of partnerships which benefit parents, teachers and pupils.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter sets the presentational agenda for the research. It provides a context and rationale for the research, outlines the structure of the thesis and introduces the research questions and research issues. The methodology, research design and boundaries of the thesis are given alongside a summary of the limitations and contributions made by this research.

Chapter 2. Research Issues

2.1 Introduction

In chapter 1, I describe how educational history was made when a legal judgement linked the duty of care of a teacher to the giving of advice to parents. I quoted Lord Browne-Wilkins' words that ignoring underperformance flies 'in the face not only of society's expectations of what a school will provide, but also of the fine tradition of the teaching profession itself'. The judgement draws into focus how different conceptualisations of special educational needs, together with the dynamics of interactions between environments, can impact upon a child's progress at school.

Relationships between teachers and parents involve a complex interrelationship of factors many of which have arisen from the proliferation of legislative and guidance literature which have spawned 'a plethora of initiatives' in education over the last thirty years (Vincent and Tomlinson, 1997). In this chapter I review a panoply of factors which can affect the establishment of beneficial partnerships between parents and teachers working with children experiencing difficulties at school.

I begin by looking at research into home school links conducted over the last 40 years and the school effectiveness literature. I then consider the possible effects upon teachers of the State's increasing control of education and the rigid framework imposed by the National Curriculum because the tension between the standards-driven system and the inclusion agenda impacts upon teachers' relationships with parents. The focus then shifts to questions of relative responsibilities, parental rights, roles and agency and charts the development of "partnership", with its various conceptualisations and presentations, as a core principal of SEN policy. The penultimate section refers back to the National Curriculum and considers the potential affect that differentiation and assessment play in the construction of some children as "different" or as having "special educational needs". Finally the chapter reviews the lack of conceptual clarification and the contradicting and competing perspectives which have lead to an emergence of a "melange" of alternative special needs practices within an

educational framework which attempts to balance 'dilemmas of difference' (Norwich, 1996, p.33).

The chapter concludes with a drawing together of these different threads and issues and notes their influence upon my research design.

2.2 40 years of school-home links

A substantial body of literature supports the theory that the fostering of strong school-home links involving parents and teachers working in partnership has a beneficial effect upon children's learning. An upsurge of interest in the social influences on child development and beliefs about children's learning in the 1960s and 1970s led to increased interest in parental involvement and parents as partners in the education of children (Edwards and Warin, 1999). This resulted in the 1980s in the structuring of joint (shared) programmes for both parents and teachers, often designed by educational psychologists, and consisting in the main, of home-reading and home-maths projects, involving parents' direct participation in the curriculum.

Much of the partnership research literature produced in the 1980s and 90s was characterised by snapshots of apparently "successful" models of parental involvement in schools (Wolfendale, 1983; Griffiths and Hamilton, 1984; Topping and Wolfendale, 1985; Branston and Provis, 1986; Griffiths and Hamilton, 1987; Atkin, Bastiani and Goode, 1988; Bastiani, 1988; Solity and Raybould, 1988; Topping, 1988; Wolfendale, 1988; Wolfendale, 1989; Merttens and Vass, 1990; Wolfendale, 1992a). Much of this literature drew upon local small-scale projects which encouraged schools to enlist the help of parents, and demonstrated co-operation between home and school, providing examples of parents assisting within the classroom, school-community links and parents acting as educators at home.

Many of these projects tended to begin with the school and then extended outwards to include the family. Some commentators condemn this version of partnership as 'the use of selected parents to carry out chores in the school' (Macbeth, 1989, p.33) which raises questions as to the effectiveness or otherwise of these strategies for the education of the individual child. Macbeth draws a clear distinction between educational and administrative partnerships. The former he describes as 'the proper relationship between one child's parents and that child's

teacher(s) about that individual child's education at home and at school'. The latter includes such activities as serving on governing bodies, fund-raising, PTAs, school outings and sports days (Macbeth, 1995, p.51). From this viewpoint, although often viewed as such, parental involvement, participation and partnership are clearly not synonymous terms. Partnerships 'bring together people who have aims which are concordant. But a common purpose or shared aims are of no account unless a partnership is a functioning relationship which is effective in pursuing its purpose or working towards its aims' (Gallacher, 1995, p.17). Many of the projects in the 1980s, as with many current projects, disguise a deficit model of parents and parenting which would not meet Gallacher's understanding of partnership. Embedded within these projects was a hidden script which assumed that parents were unwilling educators whose participation had to be harnessed and whose involvement had to be closely monitored by teachers (Edwards and Warin, 1999, p.326). Educators who do not value or promote parent competence convey low expectations about parents to both parents and children, effectively diminishing parental competence (McCaslin and Infanti, 1998).

Although research appears to demonstrate an enhancement to children's learning by parents and teachers working together, some researchers query whether the assumption of a positive correlation between parental involvement and children's educational achievement is in fact supported by conclusive evidence. Reservations and questions arise from a lack of specificity as to which kinds of involvement trigger improvement, which variables affect results and, essentially, how improvement itself is defined (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003). There is, for example, an assumption, usually unaccompanied by empirical evidence, that parents and professionals operate within a 'mutual understanding' of each other, and that this mutuality results in effective partnerships between them (Sandow, Stafford and Stafford, 1987). This 'mutual understanding' suggests that, since the 1981 Education Act, an unproblematic sharing of priorities, responsibilities and division of labour exists between parents and teachers.

Parental involvement, described as 'supportive relations and co-operation between home and schools' is considered a key variable in school effectiveness (Sammons, Hillman and Mortimore, 1995, p.21). Effectiveness, however, is not a neutral concept, and school effectiveness 'requires choices among competing

values' (Firestone, 1991, p.2). Not all schools regard school-family links as a priority, in which case partnership issues tend to be 'bolted on' to schools' main or more immediate pressing concerns (Dyson and Robson, 1999). This may arise because of a lack of official commitment to, and acknowledgement of, the place of home-school relationships and responsibilities in the professional lives of teachers (Atkin, Bastiani and Goode, 1988, p.9). Research which is available into school effectiveness may represent partial or incomplete story telling either because of cross-sectional "snapshots" of achievements taken at a given point in time or because of limited samples, timescales and outcome measures. A bias in the literature, whether towards the professional viewpoints of teachers and schools or towards the views of special interest groups (Sandow, Stafford and Stafford, 1987; Atkin, Bastiani and Goode, 1988) may have also blurred some of the findings in this area of research. Notwithstanding this, the ongoing assumption of a positive correlation between parental involvement and children's educational achievements persists, illustrating perhaps 'the occasionally superficial nature of home-school discussions' (Vincent, 1996, p.74).

2.3 The effects of current policy

Home-school discussions and parent-teacher relationships are affected by educational reforms. Given that research appears to demonstrate an enhancement to children's learning by parents and teachers working together, I turn next to consider how the National Curriculum and a standards-driven system might impact upon teachers' relationships with parents. The pedagogy which underpins the prescribed literacy and numeracy strategies within the rigid framework of the National Curriculum (Department for Education and Employment, 1998a; Department for Education and Employment, 1998c) is derived from those areas of the school effectiveness literature which point to the 'concept of the effectiveness of teachers as instructors rather than as organisers and facilitators' (Cole, 2004, p.29). However, tensions generated between the standards-driven system and the inclusion agenda have led to home-school and parent-teacher dialogues becoming sandwiched between conflicting policies of competition, inclusion, market value and equity.

Alexander describes the values which underpin the National Curriculum, 'the official prescription for primary education' as 'utilitarian, mechanistic, populist and

philistine' (Alexander, 2000, pp.146-147) and argues that that the driving force behind educational policy is 'political priorities and election pledges' (Alexander, 2000, pp. 124-125). Baseline assessment of children starting school, (introduced in 1998), and statutory national inspection exemplify the tightly controlled and regulated nature of primary education, most of which is framed by legislation. Targets, test results, standards and educational league tables now feature as key words in an educational system which is based upon the premise that the raising of standards, measured by test scores, assures the country's economic future, (thus reversing years of perceived national decline).

Viewed through a Foucauldian lens, the curriculum reads as a message system representing positions of power (Winter, 1999, p.177). The state produces, circulates, negotiates and transmits beliefs some of which mirror the values and culture of the most powerful voices or groups within society (Winter, 1999, p.184). An educational climate which is propelled by governmental agendas which reward high attaining schools, is not favourable for vulnerable children who can become a marginalised minority (Norwich, 1996, p.37). The view that the tightly controlled and regulated nature of our primary education, invites 'close control by government and surveillance by its agencies' (Alexander, 2000, p.143) is shared by other commentators who comment that although much of the legislation appears to be child centred, it is in fact 'the means for centralised surveillance and regulation (Davies, Garner and John, 1998, p.166). Such commentaries find resonance with Foucault's notions of disciplinary technology and panopticism, a means of regulatory control through surveillance. Although less obvious and oppressive than Orwell's Big Brother (Orwell, 1965), surveillance through observation remains a feature of the organisation of modern institutional life, manifested through the creation, supervision and maintenance of norms (Ryan, 1991). The results of constant inspections, tests and examinations furnish data which is systematically recorded and constructed as norms. Such norms gain credibility as they have the appearance of being 'scientific' (Ryan, 1991, p.109). The adoption of norms and the use of normalising procedures in schools 'systematically produce inequalities despite official policy statements to the contrary' (Ryan, 1991, p.106) because it results in the construction of hierarchies which marginalise or even disqualify some children. League tables, also based on norms, place schools in

hierarchical positions, with some schools being valued higher than others. Disciplinary technologies thus 'sifts, sorts and marks' (Ryan, 1991, p.117).

The pressure generated by educational reforms, market forces and league tables which focus on pupil performance, has resulted in some primary schools 'being obliged to use parents as assistants in the delivery of an over-loaded curriculum in ways which do not draw on understandings of what parents do have to offer' (Edwards and Warin, 1999, p. 325). This version of parental involvement ignores the potential that parents have as both role models and motivators and places parents and teachers in a double bind. On the one hand, the positioning of parents as teachers effectively re-positions parents as agents of the school in the home (Brown, 1993; Edwards and Warin, 1999, p.336). On the other hand, investing parents as teachers could reflect the downgrading or 'de-skilling' of teachers. This manifests 'a curious denial of the complexity of primary school teaching and the professional skills required by primary teachers' (Edwards and Warin, 1999, p.336). The assumption of the deskilling theory, that the teacher's role is determined by external forces, denies the role of teachers as 'determining agents' who interact with, rather than passively accept, external forces (Armstrong, 1995, p.128). In this way, the de-skilling thesis obscures 'ways in which teachers act in defence of particular conceptions of their professional roles' (Armstrong, 1995, p.127). Challenges to the professional autonomy of teachers from those outside the profession downgrade teachers' skills. The National Curriculum, by centralising control over what is taught in schools, effectively removes decision-making from teachers in respect of what and how they teach (Armstrong, 1995, p.126). Additionally, or perhaps as a result of this undermining of their professional status, teachers themselves suggest a narrowing of skills to which they are able to lay claim. The identification of large numbers of children whose needs apparently can either not be met in mainstream schools or without recourse to outside "experts" implies a shifting of responsibility and suggests a reduced range of skills to which teachers are able to lay claim. Furthermore parents, if or when viewed by teachers as critical consumers, may also be perceived as questioners of teacher judgement. Indeed the very process of 'listening to parents challenges assumptions about definitions of reality' which can threaten a teacher's notion of professionalism (Bastiani, 1988, p.173). It is not

surprising then that feelings of vulnerability and professional uncertainty can lead to teachers adopting defensive stances (Atkin, Bastiani and Goode, 1988; Wolfendale, 1992b; Rouse and Agbenu, 1998), with experiences of negative episodes leading teachers to 'use their status to isolate and defend themselves' (Stacey, 1991, p.26).

Updated data derived from interviews with primary teachers in England interviewed in 1995, 1997 and 1998 provide an important indication as to the effects of constant legislative and policy changes upon the primary classroom (Alexander, 2000). In the original study, Alexander described four pairs of complementary teacher and parent roles: consultant-client, bureaucrat-claimant, equal partners and casual acquaintances. Tacit acceptance of these roles by both parties leads to straightforward relationships. Difficulties arise when one party or the other is unaware of, or chooses not to play the appropriate role. As Todd and Higgins (1998) note, the perceptions of both parties in problem discourses can act as a barometer of the attitudes of, in this case, parents and teachers, to each other. In Alexander's later study, he extends the typologies to general characterisations of the ways in which schools relate to parents as a generic group, expressed in terms of communication, co-operation, confrontation and compensation.

This terminology is interesting as it reflects how the Education Reform Act (Department of Education and Science, 1988) and the 'Parent's Charter' (Department of Education, 1994) may have effected a shift in the balance of power between parents and teachers (Walker, 1993). As parents have been given a more central role in the education system much of the rhetoric has been about power and accountability, changing the perceptions of the roles and functions of teachers and parents in education. The concept of partnership may have become less about equality and mutuality and more about getting value for money (Stacey, 1991, p.78). Herein lies a paradox. Whilst parents appear to gain the right to send their child to a school of their choice, they lose the right to choose the kind of education their child will receive once they are in that school. Since all schools now follow the same curriculum, the notion of choice relates to perceptions of quality rather than content (Alexander, 2000, p.235).

2.3.1 Whose responsibility is it?

Changes in the roles and functions of teachers and parents in education create potentially confusing situations which can impact upon relationships between them. The lack of clarity as to the relative positions of both teachers and parents has engendered 'the contentious issue of parental responsibility' (Miller, 1996). The difficulty here is in deciding who has responsibility, and to what degree, for what? How are responsibilities to be understood by professionals and agencies such as teachers and schools? These are ethical dilemmas which are addressed on an individual basis by parents, educators and other professionals involved with children.

When children start giving cause for concern at school, a significant percentage of parents first approach the class teacher and head teacher who are perceived as the most important professionals in this area (Sandow, Stafford and Stafford, 1987). Special education needs is characterised by specialised knowledge which may 'represent an overwhelming power in the relationship' (Sandow, Stafford and Stafford, 1987, p.154). For teachers who see themselves as experts in relation to parents, this can locate the understanding of children's difficulties uniquely within a professional domain. However 'the strong inequality of power between schools in the area of special education' (Fylling and Sandvin, 1999, p.154) results in many parents being hesitant to reveal or mention the problems they experience with their relationships with schools. Problematic situations arise if parents find their trust in the expertise of professionals to be misplaced, and the forthcoming "help" to be controlling rather than instrumental (McCaslin and Infanti, 1998).

Parents and teachers differ in their knowledge, skills and status, but by law it is parents who are responsible for their children's education with teachers assisting in the fulfilling of this duty (Macbeth, 1995, p.50). Whilst the child remains the pivotal point around which parents and teachers can work in partnership, difficulties arise due to 'disagreement or ignorance of each other's definition' of the best way forward for the good of the child (Stacey, 1991, p.27). Teachers find themselves in situations where they feel they have to both involve and manage parents whilst maintaining professional boundaries (Crozier, 1998b). The role that parents now play in education affects teachers' view of their own roles and

responsibilities. This impacts upon good communication, 'the heart of any teacher's job' (Stacey, 1991). The effectiveness or otherwise of educational legislation within the classroom is significantly influenced by teachers' perspectives and practices (Solity, 1992). Some teachers experience disempowerment and an apparent lowering of status, fuelled by perceptions of an erosion of autonomy for educational professionals. Others remain ambivalent towards the empowering of parents and the idea of parents as equal partners in education. This can result in what Wolfendale describes as 'teachers' hostile and negative attitudes'. This, she argues, stems from three 'legitimate concerns': the undermining of teachers' professionalism, the fact that parents are not necessarily well-informed and that active parents are a vocal, self-selecting group which is not representative of all parents (Wolfendale, 1992b, p.10).

2.3.2 Parental rights

The Education Reform Act (1988) increased the legal rights of parents in England and Wales and gave them representation on governing bodies, choice of schools and access to information (Macbeth, 1989). Munn, (1985) considers the effects of this increased access to information upon teacher-parent communication. She concludes that 'recent legislation has made it more difficult for parents to obtain the information they want by placing parent-teacher relations in a combative framework and by encouraging teachers to retreat behind a smokescreen of professionalism' (Munn, 1985, p.105). Munn notes that several research projects undertaken in the late 1970s found parental trust in the expertise and competence of teachers to be a pervasive feature. Parents predominantly sought 'direct information about what and how their children were doing at school' (Munn, 1985, p.106). Requests for this kind of information stem from a parental desire to help their children through school, and not as a means of monitoring teacher competence. The paradox, as Munn sees it, is that it is the very trust that many parents have in teachers as experts which serves to inhibit parent-teacher communication (Munn, 1985, p.107). If teachers are seen as competent experts in a way that parents are not, then questions asked or information sought can be interpreted 'either as a challenge to teachers expertise or illegitimate' (Munn, 1985, p.107).

The 1993 Education Act, now the 1996 Education Act, extended parental choice and parental rights, forcing policy makers and other professionals to face up to the subsequent implications and effects (Wolfendale, 1997, p.102). Education policies have effectively repositioned parents as consumers of education services (Vincent and Tomlinson, 1997). Sayer (1996) refers to the imposition of a set of consumerist 'choice' measures which encourages parents to both choose and control schools forcing a situation in which 'governors and parents were to become government agents and informants' (Sayer, 1996, p.17). However 'the fact that things have not worked the way the legislation has pointed is a tribute to the partnership between parents and teachers, based on their shared prime concern for the welfare of children' (Sayer, 1996, p.17). Vincent and Tomlinson (1997) view the notion of parent as consumer as flawed, arguing that 'the apparent agency embedded in the role of consumer does not necessarily influence parents' relationships with teachers once a choice of schools is made' and that, as I noted above, choice does not equal voice (Vincent and Tomlinson, 1997, pp.361-362):

However, the appearance of choice, free from constraint, often proved to be a chimera as the ability to access resources remains structured by endemic social inequalities, caught in the complexities of artificial purchaser-provider divisions' (Vincent and Tomlinson, 1997, p.363).

Although possibly conceptualised as a means of curbing teacher incompetence, the rhetoric of parental choice can function instead as a chimera generating anger and frustration among parents. Shifts in both rhetoric and policy, although (re)positioning parents as potential consumers, do not automatically bring a radical change in the lived experiences of parents who may experience limited actual change in their relationships with teachers.

The increasing attention paid to parents' rights affects partnership issues (Wolfendale, 1992b, p.71). Information embedded in 'a hothouse atmosphere' (Munn, 1985, p.108) of rhetoric about parents' rights and accountability for example, does not lend itself to the promotion of mutually supportive frameworks. Kipnis argues that the 'dominion' theory incorporates the notion of property as exemplified by the possessive references that parents make to "their" children or "their" child' (Kipnis, 1993). Based on the premise that families constitute the basic units of society, Kipnis argues that parenthood bestows certain rights in decision-making

regarding upbringing and education. Young (1990) however queries the notion of the distribution of rights, arguing that rights have no material being, and therefore can not be distributed in the same way as goods or resources:

Rights are not fruitfully conceived as possessions. Rights are relationships, not things; they are institutionally defined rules specifying what people can do in relation to one another. Rights refer to doing more than having, to social relationships that enable or constrain action (Young, 1990, p.25).

This suggests that a focus on possession 'tends to preclude thinking about what people are doing' (Young, 1990, p.25). Young asserts that 'positions of decision-making authority are usually occupied by members of privileged groups' whose authoritative decisions are based on assumptions and standards claimed to be neutral and impartial. Such decisions, she believes, serve often to 'silence, ignore and render deviant the abilities, needs and norms of others' (Young, 1990, p.116). Too great an emphasis upon parental rights can place partnership in a combative framework which may actively constrain effective home school communication (Munn, 1985, p.110) jeopardising the establishment of relationships which function in the best interests of the child.

2.3.3 Parental roles and agency

I turn now to what might aptly be called the duty of care that parents have to their children. Psychological theory and research have produced three constructs central to the fundamental decisions that parents' make about involvement in their children's education. Parental agency, discussed in generic terms, does not give access to all of the issues. However it has importance in understanding the individualist perspective that some parents adopt. The first construct, embedded in parents' role construction, defines parents' beliefs about their role in their children's education. The second construct focuses upon parents' sense of efficacy and their beliefs that their involvement can influence their children's educational outcomes. The third construct is linked to parents' perceptions of opportunities for involvement as generated by the school (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997, p.3). School involvement programmes will only partially succeed if they fail to address the first two constructs.

Parental involvement literature broadly categorises parental activities as including home-based activities (for example, reviewing and monitoring progress, homework, discussion of school events, and providing enrichment activities) and school-based involvement (for example, helping on school outings, open evenings, volunteering, and serving on governing committees and parent-teacher associations). Family status variables, (income, education, ethnicity and marital status), although often related to parental involvement, cannot fully explain parental decisions and choices. Status 'does not determine parents' thinking, actions or influence related to their involvement in children's schooling' (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997, pp.7-8). Although social, cultural and economic resources may predispose attitudes and approaches, they require activation (Lareau, 1989), therefore predispositions grounded in status variables do not "automatically" result in predictable outcomes (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997, p.8). Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler support their argument by referencing several studies which have found process variables, what parents think and do, to be the more reliable predictors of school related outcomes, of which parents' ability to nurture positive educational outcomes is one example.

Theoretical and empirical work suggest that parents develop beliefs and understandings about the requirements and expectations of the parental role 'as a function of their membership and participation in various groups' (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997, p.17). The self-efficacy theory suggests that the choices parents make are dependent upon their expectations of outcomes rather than upon the skills they possess and that strong self-efficacy beliefs lead to high goals and commitment to meeting these goals. This explains why some parents with apparently lower levels of appropriate resources can and do act 'efficaciously and effectively' (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997, p.18). A belief in the possibility of exercising control over 'adverse events' means that difficulties, if or when encountered, can be responded to with increased effort. The theory underlying this is that if success depends upon effort rather than ability, then failure results from insufficient effort rather than lack of ability. The self-efficacy theory intersects with alternative theories which posit that self-belief, effort and positive educational outcomes are affected by the possession and activation of appropriate social, cultural and economic resources.

Some parents adopt a 'compensatory' role and seek help or advice outside of the school (Atkin and Bastiani, 1988, pp.98-99). This role often includes supplying the school with additional information, which may draw upon expertise from the private sector, including private reports from educational psychologists, specialist teachers, independent assessment centres or the voluntary sector. When parents attempt to introduce different perspectives they may meet with 'a certain indulgence' or with a determined refusal (Fylling and Sandvin, 1999). This can reinforce the perception that partnership is a principal-agent relationship which draws upon an unequal balance of power. This is the conclusion drawn from a study which compares and contrasts the role of parents in special education with that of parents in education more generally. The researchers suggest that the relationship between the two groups contains 'other features than those reflecting in the existing literature on parents' role in education' (Fylling and Sandvin, 1999, p.144). To extract these features and to reflect how parents are perceived by teachers in the study, the researchers construct two roles¹, parents as 'implementers' and parents as 'clients'². As 'implementers', parents essentially adopt the passive role of following up aims and measures set by the school, similar to the 'school-based' approach described by Stacey (1991). Parents become 'clients' when teachers see them as part of the child's problem. Both roles, according to the researchers, place parents in 'a subordinate and powerless relationship with the school', due to the inequality of power between laypersons and professionals (Fylling and Sandvin, 1999, p.144). In relation to the roles of parents in special education the researchers found that parent-teacher relationships were usually stronger and more complex than between parents and teachers generally, with more formal and informal contact. Although this level of involvement leads to frequent contact between parents and school, relationships between parents and teachers in the study were not necessarily characterised by mutuality and a common understanding of the child and its needs. It should be noted that although the study was conducted in Norway, where parents play an active role and have 'decisive power in all-important questions about their

¹ The researchers stress that their use of roles is Weberian in that 'ideal-types' is employed as an analytical concept which condenses, highlights and sometimes exaggerates features of reality.

² The term 'client' is used elsewhere in the literature as exemplifying quasi-market mechanisms and accountability within education to illustrate what has been referred to as 'the metaphors of the market, the accountant and the assembly line' (Hartley, 1991).

children's education'(Fylling and Sandvin, 1999, p.147), its findings contribute to understandings of parent-teacher relationships wherever located.

2.3.4 Alternative perspectives

Not all schemes which encourage parents to be involved in their children's learning are equally successful. Some parents fail to participate in, or drop out of, schemes devised to support children's learning, or choose 'active non-participation' (Pugh and De'Ath, 1989, Vincent,1996). There are several possible explanations for this not all of which are fully explored within the literature on parental involvement. One example of this are the descriptions of models of involvement which ignore ethical and political issues resulting in a dearth of literature relating to, for example, the perspectives of black and minority parents of children with SEN (Diniz, 1999, p.216).³ Other approaches to family-school relationships fail to account 'for the influence of social stratification on individual biographies' (Lareau, 1989, p.4). This, Lareau maintains, produces descriptions which inadequately account for the effect of social class advantage. She is also critical of explanations which presume a deterministic relationship between social class, values and behaviour. However, several empirical studies of parental participation in schooling, explicitly sociological in approach, refer to the social characteristics of individuals and groups such as social class, ethnicity and gender. Some of these studies, discussed below, contribute to the development of a sociological analysis of the home-school relationship. The first point to make is that the use of the term "parent" in the literature disguises the 'gendered nature of the responsibility for schooling' despite evidence which suggests that, in the main, it is mothers who take the prime responsibility for monitoring and attempting to remedy children's schooling and educational experiences. This "ungendering" of the term "parent" results in mothers' voices not being 'heard as women' (Cole, 2004, p.13).

Cole reminds us that "parenting" and "parenthood", "mothering" and "motherhood" are terms which can be difficult to define because they are located

³ Diniz (1999) noted that although ethnic minority communities have been extensively researched, scant research relates to the interrelationship between race and SEN. This he linked to 'competing discourses which are often conducted in separate 'fora' by groups whose professional identities are seen as distinct'.

within culturally specific contexts (Cole, 2004, p.53). Yet 'the dominant model of motherhood prioritises the white, Anglo American middle-class model' (Collins, cited in Cole, 2004, p. 54). Public discourses of motherhood tend to render invisible mothers of children with SEN whose emergence in the public discourses of SEN is mainly through 'the expert and professional discourse on their children' (Cole, 2004, p.58). Prior to the mid-1980s, discourses 'were 'about' mothers rather 'by' them' (Cole, 2004, p.52).

Crozier (1997) and others (e.g. Vincent and Martin, 2002) pick up Lareau's argument mentioned above which is that a key influence upon parental participation in schools derives from the confidence generated by social class and cultural capital, that is, from access to the "right" kind of "educational knowledge". Social class location impacts directly upon working class parents' ability to intervene in their child's schooling given their less easily acquired access to the appropriate cultural capital. This at least partially accounts for the cultural deficit model in relation to working-class parents (Cole, 2004, p.12). Reay endorses this, suggesting that parental activities of 'complementing, compensating and modifying' produce very different outcomes as the material and educational resources required to do these tasks or fulfil these functions are disproportionately distributed within middle and working class families (Reay, 1998). Whilst working class mothers are primarily engaged in the 'complementing' process which appears to require less cultural capital than 'modifying' and 'compensating' (Reay, 1998, p.101), many middle class mothers have the material and educational resources to 'weave in and out of all the three roles' (Reay, 1998, p.5). This complements Lareau's (1989) findings which conclude that home-school relationships are 'characterised by separateness for working-class families and by interconnectedness for middle class families' (Reay, 1998, p.29).

The myth of meritocracy as a process which normalises inequalities sustains 'fictions of equal access and homogenous provision' (Reay, 1998, p.1). Reay found the engagement of mothers in the 'monitoring and repairing (of) their children's education' reasserted 'the centrality of social class, as gendered and racialized' (Reay, 1998, p.3). She provides examples of how 'the everyday minutiae of individual actions is implicated in the sustaining of hierarchies of power' (Hey,

1999) and argues, like Brown (1993) that home-school relationships reproduce social inequality' (Reay, 1998, p.1). Hierarchies, according to Reay, are the keys to comprehending home-school relationships. Seen through a feminist lens, working class mothers struggle to 'assert their knowledge and experience against an education market and individual schools hijacked by others with the 'right' sort of symbolic, educational, cultural and economic capital' (Hey, 1999). It is important to note that the perceptions of working-class and middle-class parents (mainly mothers) towards their children's place in the educational marketplace dominate the study whilst the views of the primary school staff, (often subjected to complaints from the mothers), are less frequently quoted.

Reay focuses on linguistic interaction between parent and teachers which, she hypothesises, provide the clearest view of the power dynamics which permeate all interaction between mothers and school staff. She draws upon Bourdieu's work to provide a framework for understanding social processes between home and school. Cultural capital, according to Reay, is the key to 'all dimensions of the process of contacting and communicating with teachers'. Cultural capital, related as it is to individual and personal resources of confidence, information about available educational provision, assertiveness and a sense of entitlement, is affected by class position (Reay, 1998, pp.102-103). Interaction between mothers and teachers is complex and mediated by power differentials which affect the receptivity of teachers to parental requests and the communicating of concerns. Reay concludes that 'Schooling is no unitary homogenous product. Educational provision appears to be shaped by a combination of the perceived needs of different pupil intakes and the power of the demands made by parents' (Reay, 1998, p.67). Partnership therefore involves complex interactions, described as a 'cocktail of teachers' expectations of children, parental expectations of school, differential relationships of power between parents, teachers, children, local government and the state' (Reay, 1998, p.68). Stirred into this cocktail are intricate layers of discourse which inform understandings of the relationship between culture and educational achievement. The whole belies some areas within the school effectiveness literature that simplistically asserts that what teachers do makes a difference (Reay, 1998, p.68):

While there are many positive aspects of parent-teacher relationships,

they are a far more complex mixture of negative and positive features than the harmonious partnerships between parents and schools described in the texts on parental involvement (Reay, 1998, p.125).

One of the negative features to surface in the texts on parental involvement relates to a failure to recognise the heterogeneity of parents. A socially undifferentiated image of parents leads to strategies for parental involvement being constructed from a logocentric position. Such strategies may emanate more from a desire to exert control than from a commitment to furthering egalitarianism (Crozier, 1998b). This control, which helps to present a facade of professional unity and 'place(s) parents (of whatever background) in a subordinate position in relation to the professionals', can subsume pedagogical differences between teachers (Vincent, 1996, p.149).

Stereotypical assumptions which present parents largely as a homogenous group with clearly definable sets of common characteristics or pathological forms (e.g. the "pushy" parent) can have negative effects:

Despite the homogeneity reigning in the texts on parental involvement, educational professionals often adopt deficit conceptions of certain parent groups, based on assumptions relating to ethnicity, gender, marital status and social class. Juxtaposing such taken-for-granted assumptions with textual constructions which deny difference is becoming increasingly important within a contemporary context in which increased parental involvement and parental choice are invariably presented as beneficial (Reay, 1998, p.4).

Assumptions made about parents, and reflected in the documentation found at the heart of partnership schemes, have resulted in a one-way process of involvement with parents which has affected parental disempowerment (Brown, 1993). Much of the home-school debate has lacked a critical approach and has been described as 'perfunctory and superficial' (Vincent, 1996, p.73) with a reliance on consensual language such as 'partnership', 'dialogue', 'involvement' and 'sharing'. This has obscured differences in interpretation and contributed to the editing out of problems and failures. Fixed models of 'good practice' contain culturally bound assumptions of 'good parenting' (Vincent, 1996, p.47). These perspectives suggest that educational reforms have repositioned parental involvement further away from an understanding of the interrelationships of the

contexts within which children learn (Edwards and Warin, 1999) and that parental involvement requires 'new thinking and new ways of working' (Bastiani, 1995).

2.4 Conceptualising "partnership"

That parental involvement 'can mean a multitude of things in different contexts' (Sammons, Hillman and Mortimore, 1995, p.21) may in part be due to what Edwards and Warin (1999) refer to as the 'sterility of thinking and paucity of research in the field of parental involvement'. Definitions of home-school partnerships which refer simply to 'parental involvement in their children's learning' (Sammons, Hillman and Mortimore, 1995, p.8) contribute to the underplaying of the complexity of parental involvement within the school improvement literature. This ambivalence or ambiguity towards the conceptualisation of home-school partnerships is further illustrated by a funded initiative, reported by Edwards and Waring, which was aimed at raising pupil achievement in numeracy and literacy through parental involvement in areas of social deprivation and poor pupil performance. Criteria for inclusion in the project required only that 'parental involvement of some kind should be evident'. The nature and degree of this involvement was unspecified (Edwards and Warin, 1999, p.329). The researchers noted 'the flag of parental involvement being saluted' yet were intrigued by some schools' 'lack of interest in the distinct purpose of parental involvement' and had difficulty discerning 'what exactly the schools wanted parents to contribute to a child's learning (Edwards and Warin, 1999, p.330). Nevertheless, the research confirms an emphasis in the partnership rationale 'on breaking down barriers between home and school to ease the one-way flow of information and materials which carried school values into pupils' homes' (Edwards and Warin, 1999, p.335).

Various researchers have sought to establish a conceptual framework for teacher-parent and/or home-school partnership. A multi-disciplinary three year study, which looked at the different kinds of roles played by parents in school and pre-school centres, focussed upon the quality of the relationships between parents and professionals (Pugh et al., 1987). The research studied the factors which impacted upon these relationships and questioned whether the relationships could be (re)defined as partnerships. The conclusion of the research was that 'little was identified that could be truly described as partnership':

Despite the recommendations of most of the major educational reports published in the past 25 years, studies suggest that while arguments in favour of a closer relationship with parents may have been accepted in theory, there is still some way to go in practice (Pugh, 1989, p.2).

Pugh conceptualised partnership as:

A working relationship that is characterised by a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect and the willingness to negotiate. This implies a sharing of information, responsibility, skills, decision-making and accountability (Pugh, 1989, p.5).

Pugh noted that the approach of professionals lacked uniformity. Some sought to develop partnerships with parents which demonstrated a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect and a willingness to negotiate. Others sought to change perceived deficiencies in parents' behaviour or to develop parents' capacities to teach their own children. Simply involving parents and increasing contact between parents and schools does not imply that the relationship is necessarily characterised by mutuality and a common understanding of the child and its needs (Fylling and Sandvin, 1999). Pugh concluded that little progress had been achieved in establishing a concept of partnership based on a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect and meaningful dialogue between parents and professionals and that 'such approaches [as existed] can hardly be viewed as partnership' (Pugh, 1989, p.15). This research also serves to challenge a seemingly widespread notion that pre-school education and special education represent the most productive arenas for genuine partnerships between parents and schools (Fylling and Sandvin, 1999).

Others conceptualised effective partnerships in terms of four dimensions namely: rights, equality, reciprocity and empowerment (Wolfendale, 1983; Pugh, 1989; Wolfendale, 1992b; Bastiani, 1993). Transparent engagement with these four conceptual dimensions of partnership might avoid what Stacey (1991) referred to as 'the enormous imbalance between the "partners"' resulting from forms of parental involvement which effectively delegate parents a passive rather than active role, a one-way dialogue dictated and controlled by the school:

Where teachers have a more 'school-based' approach the role of the parent as an educator is either not acknowledged or not valued. When they ask parents to carry out tasks with their children they ask them to follow certain rules and not to step into the teacher's territory (Stacey, 1991,

p.47).

Research suggests that parental contributions are only positively viewed by teachers when perceived as extending school activities or implementing programmes initiated within the school (Fylling and Sandvin, 1999), and that the preferred role for parents from the school's perspective is as 'supporter/learner' (Vincent, 1996). Relationships overly dominated by teachers and professionals become 'more a question of instructions than co-operation, and of 'implementation' more than 'partnership' (Fylling and Sandvin, 1999, p.149).

Listening to the parental "voice" is seen as fundamental to the development of more collaborative models of partnership (Atkin, Bastiani and Goode, 1988, p.vii). These researchers drew upon a broad cross section of parental attitudes and backgrounds and added the perspectives of parents and children to the existing literature. Their research reveals significant areas of mismatch between teachers' views of parents' needs and parents' own views (Atkin, Bastiani and Goode, 1988, p.107). Collaborative models of partnership involve different yet complementary roles for the professional teacher and the lay parent. 'Listening to parents' requires an active approach from teachers, an 'act of faith in suspending any assumptions about "parental interest"' (Atkin, Bastiani and Goode, 1988, p.42). This process involves teachers recognising that parents also have knowledge, skills and expertise to contribute to the learning process of their children and that the two sources of knowledge about children can be experienced as complementary. Realigning perceptions of parental knowledge into useful resources for teachers could lead to a reduction of anxiety for both teachers and parents (Miller, 1996) resulting in potentially more collaborative models of partnership. Increased knowledge production should be potentially beneficial to the quality of teaching and learning for all (Hargreaves, 12/11/1999; Atkin, Bastiani and Goode, 1988). However, 'the process of knowledge production' embodies:

Power relations between and among teacher and learners (defined either narrowly to refer to the actors in institutionalized education or broadly to refer to other pedagogical relations such as those of parents and children, writers and readers, and so on) concerning issues of knowledge: "What is valid knowledge?" "What knowledge is produced?" "Whose knowledge?" and so on (Gore, 1993, p.60, original italics).

It may be that successful parent-teacher interactions involve negotiations of mutually agreed definitions, and the use of strategies by parents and teachers 'when faced with different and sometimes incompatible systems of relevancies' (Sharp, Green and Lewis, 1975, p.198). A certain degree of role-playing may be required from parents in order to convince teachers of their knowledge, interest and support. Equally, teachers engaging in 'impression management' may present themselves as sympathetic listeners to parents (whatever private views they may hold). 'Unsuccessful' parents may be the ones who embrace the role of the good parent by not, as they see it, interfering with the teacher's responsibility. Alternatively, they may be the parents who castigate the school and communicate dissatisfaction with teacher competence. The researchers conclude that 'ordered and stable interaction may as much depend upon mutual deception and misunderstanding as on genuine communality of meaning' (Sharp, Green and Lewis, 1975, p.211). Additionally, good relationships depend 'upon a refusal to call into question established power positions and their legitimacy' (Sharp, Green and Lewis, 1975, p.219). Vincent (1996) endorses this, referring to the 'oppositional logic' developed by some parents which, rather than leading to a confrontational situation leads to a maintained separateness or independence (Vincent, 1996, p.5).

2.5 "Partnership" as a core principle of SEN policy

I turn now to consider developments in the official policies and rhetoric of "working with parents" and the subsequent establishment of partnership as a core principle of SEN policy. Partnership is the term usually used to describe beneficial relations between parents and schools (Stacey, 1991, p.145). The Warnock Report (Department of Education and Science, 1978) directly addressed this issue declaring that the relationship between parents and professionals:

...should be a partnership, and ideally an equal one ... for although we tend to dwell upon the dependence of many parents on professional support, we are well aware that professional help cannot be wholly effective, if at all so, unless it builds upon the parents' capacity to be involved. Thus we see the relationship as a dialogue between parents and helpers working in a partnership. [...] Parents can be effective partners only if professionals take notice of what they say and of how they express their needs, and treat their contribution as intrinsically important (Department of Education and Science, 1978, p.151).

A similar perspective underlay the 1981 Education Act (Department of Education and Science, 1981). Subsequently however, the transformation of the policy of the Act into practice was to prove problematic (Vernon, 1999, p.6). A Green Paper (Department for Education and Employment, 1997) resulted in a programme of action (Department for Education and Employment, 1998b) which reinforced partnership as a core principle of special educational needs policy. Central government funded the initial setting up of Parent Partnership Schemes (PPSs) providing a formal expression of a commitment to partnership between educational professionals and parents, endorsed by on-going funding for the provision of Parent Partnership Services (PPS) (Department for Education and Employment, 1998b). The stated aim of the PPS was the provision of 'access to information, advice and guidance' in order to empower parents in the making of 'appropriate, informed decisions' relating to the educational needs of their children (Department for Education and Employment, 2000. p.10).

These schemes had the potential to facilitate and contribute to effective partnerships, yet Ofsted noted that parent partnership schemes had had relatively little impact on schools' SEN practices and policies. Most schools surveyed 'merely kept records of parental contacts rather than details of the issues raised by parents or points discussed' (Office for Standards in Education, 1997, p.25). Many schools acknowledged that there was scope for improvement both in keeping parents informed of their child's progress and in their involvement in reviews of children's individual education plans (IEPs). Parental involvement was often perceived as very time consuming with resource implications. Information about partnership schemes was often not passed to schools who were therefore unable to inform parents. Vernon suggests that some PPSs had taken 'the form of a series of activities which invariably lack an overall conceptual framework of partnership with parents to inform their development' (Vernon, 1999, p.3). Little progress seems to have been made from the 'idealistic myths and vague notions of parent-teacher partnership' which have hampered parents and teachers working together for the benefit of children (Stacey, 1991, p.3).

The commitment to joint action, the sharing of aims and goals, mutuality and the sharing of power and responsibility is reflected within the Code of Practice

(Department for Education and Skills, 2001). The Code's guidelines for the involvement of parents state that parents should:

- Play an active and valued role in their children's education;
- Have children's difficulties identified early with appropriate intervention to tackle them;
- Have a real say in the way in which their child is educated;
- Have knowledge of what they can expect for their child as of right; and
- Have access to information, advice and support during assessment and any related decision-making process about special educational provision

(Department for Education and Employment, 2000, p.8).

The challenging nature of partnerships was acknowledged in the (revised) Code of Practice which referred to the 'key information' and 'critical role' (Department for Education and Skills, 2001, p.16) that parents hold and perform in their children's education. Highlighted also were the negative effects of teachers' assumptions, presumptions and stereotyping which can inhibit 'active' partnerships with parents by presenting barriers to participation: 'There should be no presumption about what parents can do to support their child's learning. Stereotypic views of parents are unhelpful and should be challenged' (Department for Education and Skills, 2001, p.17). The Code also acknowledged the key role that the voluntary sector plays in fostering partnerships with parents, not only in providing advocacy, information, advice and support, but also in relaying the parental perspective gained through 'its unequalled access to parents' views' (Vernon, 1999, p.63).

One exploration of "partnership" in the special educational decision-making process focuses upon the professional-client interaction which occurs during assessment procedures (Armstrong, 1995). Armstrong notes the humanitarian principles frequently cited by professionals involved in the assessment of special educational needs but queries how these principles stand in relationship to the power implicit within the activity of defining the needs of others, hence:

Power necessarily stands in relation to something else. It exists as power over something or someone, and it is the dependency of this 'other' that conversely defines the limits of power. In this sense power is

also dependent upon the unmet needs of those who lack power. Thus, power is only meaningful in so far as it creates the dependency of the powerless. This implies that there is a contradiction in the professional-client relationship in special education between benevolence and control which the concept of 'partnership' does little to address (Armstrong, 1995, p.1).

Armstrong argues that participation can create the illusion of empowering parents by giving them access to the same decision-making machinery that serves to control them. For some parents, their participation as so-called "partners" in the assessment procedure inhibits their attempts to pursue particular outcomes and results instead in contributing to their disempowerment. Parental participation can thus disempower parents by legitimizing outcomes and masking conflicts with apparent parent-professional consensus. However, Armstrong's case study data also suggests that some parents successfully negotiate what they consider to be satisfactory outcomes, or consensus as to the nature or extent of the "need". Although grounded in genuine concern, the rhetoric of partnership, in practice, contains a submerged text which relates to negotiations over the nature of the respective responsibilities of schools and parents and the management of resources.

Further evidence of the relatively powerful hold that schools have over home-school communications is supplied by research which explores the social stratification and asymmetry of power that exists in interactions between parents and teachers (Brown, 1993, p.192). This analysis questions and describes the extent and nature of dialogue between parents and teachers participating on the IMPACT home-school maths project. Brown's work foregrounds both 'the power of discourse and also the asymmetries of power within discourse' (Brown, 1993, p. 200). He argues that certain kinds of interaction and participation 'act to maintain the power of the teacher over the parent [...] and reinforce the reproduction of existing social inequalities through schooling' (Brown, 1993, p.192). Through his empirical work, Brown demonstrates that schools define the terms of dialogue between parents and teachers. Partnership projects such as IMPACT tend to reinforce inequalities between parents from different social class backgrounds (Brown, 1993, p.203). Brown analyses the booklets produced in the project and found that the texts 'both speak to and about parents' (Brown, 1993, p.205), and contribute to 'the setting up of a normalising discourse' through statements

‘about what good parents do or should do’ (Brown, 1993, p.207). This discourse functions as a standard against which actual parents are then judged. This element of teacher practice serves to maintain parents in a ‘position of powerlessness’ and ‘might act to even more effectively reproduce the very social divisions that we would claim we are trying to counter’ (Brown, 1993, p.210).

2.6 “Special educational needs”

The final part of this review looks at various conceptualisations of “special educational needs”. This is particularly relevant since my research focuses upon relationships between parents and teachers involved with children who experience difficulties at school. The SEN perspective provides a crucial and critical lens upon educational principles, reminding us of the diversity of assumptions, methods and values to be found within education generally (Norwich, 1996). The special education system has evolved from ‘competing and contradictory policy discourses’ namely a humanitarian policy discourse of “inclusion” and a focus on academic standards and the normalisation of academic achievement (Armstrong, 1999, p.9). These alternative discourses characterise both the thinking about, and the shape of, special education today.

2.6.1 Differentiation and assessment

Both teacher assessments and standardised test scores of specified attainment targets appear in reports to parents and play a leading role in the design of the National Curriculum. Published league tables influence parental choice of schools affecting schools’ future recruitment of children. This is an example of a technical managerialism, both ideologically and in practice, which ignores the diversity of students. The prescribed centralised curriculum and associated standardised testing are underpinned by the dominant ideology of the “norm” and the stereotypical view of the “normal” student which, in turn, leads to the reconstruction of others as “different” or, perhaps, as having “special educational needs”. However, what counts as an educational difficulty or impairment cannot necessarily be resolved on the basis of ‘single assessments of performance in limited situations’ (Norwich, 1996, p.19). A common core curriculum can not easily account for differences and diversity amongst pupils, and will privilege certain groups whilst marginalising others as ‘different from the norm’ (Winter, 1999, p.202). As Ryan notes, the creation of inequalities remains an ‘integral component of a

system of administration bent on attaining maximum levels of productivity and docility. [...] The processes of normalisation produce differences and at the same time require inequalities for their functioning'. If normalising processes continue to be rigorously pursued, inequalities will continue (Ryan, 1991, p.110). Or as Slee (1999) puts it '...the school gate still stands as an electronic turnstile which bars entry to those children who do not metaphorically hold the correct pin-number' (Slee, 1999, p.206).

The introduction and implementation of the prescribed National Curriculum incorporated the expressed values of "equal opportunities" and "inclusion" (Corbett and Norwich, 1998), thus the notion of equality of entitlement is embedded within the framework of a highly politicised curriculum. Differentiation, the process of 'identifying differences in children as a basis for making decisions about where, what and how they should be taught' (Alexander, 2000, p.356) added "individual needs" and "the realising of potential" to the list of espoused values. Others however were less definitive than Alexander about the definition: 'Differentiation has become a way of trying to conceptualise the process of gearing teaching to the diversity of needs' (Corbett and Norwich, 1998, p.87). In common with other abstract concepts in education, differentiation has different uses and associations. However, differentiation is predominately seen as a SEN concept which is not conducive to the designing of a common curriculum for all (Corbett and Norwich, 1998, p.88).

Schools and classrooms inevitably act as cultural channels and interfaces transmitting both attitudes and values (Alexander, 2000, p.164). Those who deliver and receive education are automatically positioned as members of one culture or another, part of 'the web of inherited ideas and values, habits and customs, institutions and world views which make one country, or one region, or one group, distinct from another' (Alexander, 2000, p.5). Assumptions about social class can influence teachers' judgements on the needs and abilities of children (Sharp, Green and Lewis, 1975; Solity, 1992). Croll (2000) notes a tendency for levels of contact and consultation with parents of ethnic minority pupils to be lower than for other pupils. Equally, he finds higher levels of non-contact in schools serving areas of poverty compared with more affluent areas (Croll, 2000). This points towards low teacher expectations, and constructions of the causes of children's



difficulties still being located in deficiencies within the home. Others perceive low teacher expectation as arising from a combination of typifications grounded in both a family-home deficit theory and the very structure of primary teaching itself (Alexander, 2000, p.358). Whatever the source such assumptions can, (albeit unconsciously), undermine the objectivity of norms and standards used in teacher assessment of children.

As a process, assessment has been described as comprehensively politicized, oppressive and alienating (Alexander, 2000, p.372). Together, the two areas of differentiation and assessment form a complex continuum of educational judgement. This continuum involves both the control of education and the controlling power of education, including the means to validate dialogues and discourses. This echoes Foucault who describes the educational system as 'a political way of maintaining or modifying the appropriation of discourses along with the knowledges and powers which they carry' (Foucault, 1984, p.123). Foucault famously defined discourses as 'practices which systematically form the objects of which they purport to speak' (Foucault, 1974, p.49). From this perspective, concepts of standards, ability talk and school effectiveness read as discursive constructs which have been socially constructed by those who claim to have expertise, resulting in artificial categorisations and reifications. Solity endorses this, arguing that 'views about children's learning difficulties are promoted, and reinforced through myths in education, language usage and values' (Solity, 1992, p.23). Such assumptions, unsupported by clear evidence, pervade classroom practice, attitudes, values and children's learning outcomes (Solity, 2000). Discursive practices 'have constructed the category, official knowledge and treatment of the 'special educational needs' student' (Slee, 1999, p.211).

The framework which underpins the National Curriculum is inherently tensional, based as it is upon policy discourses which appear competing and contradictory. The framework incorporates a humanitarian policy discourse of "inclusion"; a focus on raising academic standards; the normalisation of academic achievement, and provision for commonality and difference. Not unsurprisingly, much of the literature relating to "special educational needs" has, in turn, become preoccupied with the construction and deconstruction of a corresponding range

of theoretical concepts revolving around conceptual understandings of “achievement”, “equal opportunities”, “individual needs” and “diversity”.

2.6.2 ‘Dilemmas of difference’

Contradicting and competing perspectives and processes produce alternative special needs practices (Clark et al., 1995). Whilst the dominant perspective may favour a social or curriculum model, other perspectives prioritise the need to support individual difficulties and the construction of policies geared to diversity. The issue here is what Norwich (1996) called ‘dilemmas of difference’, the balancing of the values of individuality, equality and social inclusion with curriculum planning and the location of teaching and learning. Norwich argues for an educational framework, which sees these values as interconnected rather than as alternatives. In this way, as he puts it, ‘tensions and dilemmas have to be dealt with’ (Norwich, 1996, p.33).

The multiplicity of values, reflecting the diversity in society, leads to tension and has generated much debate, multi-layered discourses and alternative ways of looking at educational difficulties which pivot about the interplay of these different values and principles (Corbett and Norwich, 1998, p.91). The psychomedical model of special educational needs, for instance, is influenced by biological and psychological theories and is heavily dependent upon the use of I.Q tests. Criticism of the model led to a more interactive perspective, a shift towards interpretivism, demonstrating the influence of sociological knowledge and theories. From this perspective, “special needs” is seen as a product of social processes. For others, the medical model, which explains difficulties in terms of characteristics within individual pupils (the “deficit” model), still dominates (Booth, 1998, p.84). Positive benefits are to be found in recognising the interrelationships between the different perspectives, contrasting positions, ideologies, initiatives and policies highlighted in the literature.

Substantial legislation has been drafted with the intention of improving participation in the school curriculum for children experiencing difficulties at school. The Code of Practice (DfEE, 1994) outlined incremental stages intended to provide for a supposed continuum of SEN. Educational assessment and provision for SEN however, are subject to social policies which determine the

resources available within individual locations and to individual providers. Nationally the definition of SEN relates to provision, resulting in the emergence of varied constructions of SEN (The British Psychological Society, 1999). This has generated discussion as to the validity of the underlying concepts, both in terms of assessment and provision, and in terms of accommodating the complete range of all students' individual educational needs.

Recent legislation is seen as 'a lost opportunity to reconceptualise special education' (Booth, 1994, p.21). From his analysis of the wording in key policy documents, Booth contends that existing definitions of "special educational need" and "learning difficulty" detract from attempts to 'match teaching styles to the diversity of learners in schools'. In his view, the terminology "special needs" can be inappropriate, implying an administrative process rather than a means of providing constructive information relating to the child and the nature of the difficulty. This version rejects the SEN concept and switches the focus away from individual needs pointing instead towards the limitations of the educational environment. Others however argue that individual difficulty versus organisational inflexibility is an example of a false causal opposition (Norwich, 1996, p.20) because the social and the individual cannot be treated as exclusive alternatives from which causal accounts are chosen.

Parents often deploy an individualist discourse to achieve personal objectives in relation to their children. Concern which is generated in a preferential direction towards one's own child at the expense of another can be explained as the choices and representations of love and kinship which "good" parents make on behalf of their children (Garvey, 1993, p.184). This is underpinned by the moral significance of the family which allows for special concerns for one child rather than for children in general (Donaldson, 1993, p.31). However, the individualist perspective raises dilemmas about the place for morally privileged relationships and how such partiality can be positioned within traditional egalitarian moral theory (Donaldson, 1993). Individuals and groups operate within localized spheres in response to individual needs. The effects of such action has only a tenuous relationship with the overall effects of their own and others' actions (Ryan, 1991, p.111). This is an example of a technology of power subject to what Foucault refers to as 'strategies' which are undirected and uncontrolled by any one

individual. Strategies, discourses and technologies become the material and terrain for the operation of power, 'a machinery which nobody owns' (Foucault, 1980). The outcomes and the structure of schooling are the product of numerous individual and group initiatives (Ryan, 1991, p.115) formed/shaped within technologies of power the effects of which may differ from the officially stated aims, as in, for example, the production of inequality. Processes, however, are not controlled by either individuals or groups of individuals in any simple way. Although inconsistent with the democratic community of citizens (Fulcher, 1999, p.48), the individualistic perspective illustrates the crux of the dilemma regarding SEN provision which has to incorporate equity between different children with practical decision-making (Norwich, 1996, p.17). Competition for scarce resources and the need to secure funding has resulted in an epidemic of medical models of labelling within an individualistic culture which accentuates deficits (Corbett, 1999, p.100) whilst detracting from the perspective that all pupils can be seen in terms of several dimensions of need (Corbett and Norwich, 1998 p.88). The social constructivist discourse rejects notions of the individual seen in isolation from the collective (Corbett, 1999, p.103)

Changes in curriculum and assessment have resulted in new policy frameworks for curricular and pedagogical approaches to SEN which have served to reconstruct teachers' categories of the educability of children (Bines, 2000). In the classroom these perspectives translate into a complex balance between individual and collective needs (Corbett, 1999, p.108) which can contribute to constraints on parent-teacher communication. A focus upon resources, provision and administrative procedures might suggest a failure within classroom-based research to establish the most effective ways of addressing and teaching children perceived to have learning difficulties (Solithy, 2000). Some, like Armstrong, adopt an interactionist perspective believing that learning difficulties are 'often not dealt with appropriately' due to inadequacies in school organisation (Armstrong, 1999). Neither Armstrong nor Solity argue for the abandonment by educators of those children struggling in mainstream classrooms. Rather, their project is to redirect the focus towards those aspects of policy and practice which result in the denial of educational opportunities and empowerment for all learners. They make the case that whilst medical and psychological

perspectives dominate and inform policy and practice, the social context within which the child is situated tends to be considered as unproblematic. In other words, managerial perspectives contribute to an inadequate account of the relationship between the school system and the social world which gives meaning to educational policy and provision (Armstrong, 1999, pp.28-29). This suggests collusion amongst those working in the education system to promote the assumption that 'children's failure to progress results from a difficulty in learning rather than from what or how they have been taught' (Solity, 2000, p.46). Collectively, when a failure to learn assumes the mantle of a "learning difficulty" or "special need" the quality of the teaching and teaching environment as a causal factor tends to be overlooked. In this way, the concept of special needs may function as a psychological and professional defence mechanism for those working within the educational system. Solity's view is that if psychological assessments of children were to commence with the premise that 'all children can learn' this would raise questions about the contribution of classroom factors to learning difficulties. Such an alternative approach might diminish the assumption that a failure to progress is always the result of a learning difficulty (Solity, 2000, p.46).

2.6.3 The need for conceptual clarification

Undefined terminologies such as "fundamental principles" of "a continuum of needs" and a "continuum of resources" can generate confusion, with presumed assumptions of meaning leading to crude notions which conceal the complexity of individual needs (Booth, 1994, p.21). The uncritical acceptance of assumptions by educational professionals can underpin and sustain notions of "need" and "provision", resulting in the categorisation and labelling of some students. Similarly, others warn of the dangers of representing SEN in terms of fixed dichotomies which deny the existence of alternatives (Norwich, 1996).

Norwich (1996) suggests that the uncertainties inherent even in the basic terms of reference reflect the ambivalence surrounding the position of special educational needs within the field of education. He concludes, like Booth, that the term implies that 'there is something different or additional about special needs education compared to ordinary education'. In terms of the ideology

underpinning inclusive mainstream education, negative labelling contradicts those values concerned with the promotion of 'the development of individuals, society, and the state, with increasing equality and opportunities, social cohesion and inclusion' (Norwich, 1996, p.4). The intention underlying the introduction of the concept of SEN was to integrate and connect SEN as an integral part of education. What has resulted instead represents a duality of both specialisation and integration, whereby SEN refers to both an integral and distinct aspect of education. In terms of specialisation, SEN represents a separate subsystem with its own professionals, training and associations. These obvious contradictions illustrate the tensions to be found in the values within society generally, and within education specifically where the values of equality and social inclusion are set as alternatives to the values of individuality (Norwich, 1996, p.32).

One model for possible progress suggests that a multi-dimensional connective framework might reverse the 'oversimplified distinction' of current views of educational "needs" which define 80% of the school population as "normal", leaving 20%, by definition, as having "special needs". The separatist perspective ignores the full range of educational needs and re-awakens the mixed ability versus ability grouping debate. It is a perspective which is seen as being both untenable and flawed (Corbett and Norwich, 1998, p.87). A failure to include those deemed to be outside of the normal range focuses attention upon needs which are significantly different rather than the many needs which are common to the majority. This serves to highlight special needs as a separate part of education, based upon a false assumption which fails to accommodate the concept that all pupils can be seen in terms of several dimensions of need (Corbett and Norwich, 1998, p.88).

Frameworks of thinking about SEN which are based on dichotomies ignore the benefits to be gained from a recognition of the interrelationships between different perspectives, values and models (Norwich, 1996, p.5). An acceptance of 'ideological impurity' could provide a route towards finding a solution to the problematics and tensions which arise from a lack of a 'clear overall and coherent set of values which can justify policy and practice at all levels' (Norwich, 1996, p.4). Acknowledging ideological impurities, according to Norwich, means recognising the pragmatic and ideological tensions inherent within a system

which seeks to promote or fulfil 'individuality and distinctness, equality, connectedness and inclusion'.

2.7 Drawing it all together

Legislation endorses and supports parents as participators in education. Although partnership issues continue to attract interest among educational researchers, issues germane to effective partnerships in potentially problematic situations appear to have escaped the purview of many researchers. There is, for example, a dearth of empirical research into the dynamics of the relationship between parents and teachers who, together, seek to find a way forward for the child giving cause for concern at school. This is the issue at the heart of the legal judgement in the introduction to this thesis. It is an issue which I feel is inadequately addressed both by the literature on partnership issues and within the texts on special educational needs.

It has been argued that, as a result of legislation, relationships between parents and teachers have become 'more complex and potentially fraught' (Alexander, 2000, p.239). Educational legislation in the 1980s, and the managerial discourse, has had the effect of constructing parents as potential consumers within an educational market place. Such fundamental changes in thinking about educational provision require changes in ideas, attitudes and practice amongst administrators, professionals and users, that is parents and children (Goacher et al., 1988). That said, there remains a relative lack of micro-level empirical work into the experiences, practices, philosophies and actions of teachers and parents attempting, if indeed they do, to work together in productive partnerships.

This scarcity of research-based evidence has doubtlessly contributed to the on-going stumbling blocks which have beset the transformation of policy into practice in spite of an unquestionable commitment to partnership in theory. I also discerned, on reading the literature, a tendency to ignore how the construction of children's needs has resulted from an interplay between the education system and wider social, economic and political processes (Armstrong, 1999 p.28). Policy, for example, which tends to be confined to discussion about the technical and professional aspects of educational provision and resources 'is inevitably a balancing act between different pressures' (Bines, 2000, p.27).

Although approximately 25% of the primary school population are registered as having “special educational needs” within mainstream primary classrooms (Croll, 2000), only a small proportion of these children have Statements of Special Educational Needs. This leads to the argument that the special needs discourse is dominated by the interests of a minority of children. Different interest groups employ competing discourses which affects what happens both within and beyond the classroom. This is particularly noticeable within the SEN field where competing and contradictory conceptualisations of difficulties generate problems relating to policy, provision and resources. Not least amongst these is the individualistic perspective often adopted by parents which raises ethical dilemmas about the place of morally privileged relationships within traditional egalitarian moral theory (Donaldson, 1993).

Partnerships which function effectively in meeting the educational needs of children have, at least at a very basic level, to both acknowledge and engage with understandings of how the individual identities of parents and children are constructed within the worlds in which they function. The same applies to the positioning of professionals within the institution of the state. In respect of the latter group, this review of the literature has been instrumental in providing a comprehensive overview of factors with potentially destabilising effects for the challenging work of re-constructing parental involvement in effective parent-teacher partnerships. The factors which impact upon contentious professional and lay dialogues, include:

- The effects of the National Curriculum which, with its emphasis upon increased accountability, challenges professional autonomy and serves to disempower and ‘de-skill’ teachers.
- An educational climate which has created the myth of a meritocracy which normalises inequalities and sustains the fiction of equal access and provision.
- The effects of educational reforms, a market philosophy and leagues tables which focus on pupil performance. These have generated normalising discourses which function as standards by which parents and children are judged.

- The repositioning of parents as potential consumers of education services which may have effected a shift in the balance of power between parents and teachers and contributed to a lack of clarity as to the relative positions held by both parties.
- Examples of ambivalence and ambiguity within conceptualisations of home-school partnerships and parental involvement. These have produced definitions which lack precision and which encompass a diversity of applications, some of which are more administrative and managerial than educational (Macbeth, 1995, p.48).
- The tendency for schools to preclude, obscure or overlook the voices of certain groups and individuals.

Within the literature relating to special educational needs, a further set of potentially destabilising factors emerge:

- Because SEN education and provision have evolved from competing and contradictory policy discourses, conceptual uncertainties are to be found even in the basic terms of reference.
- This lack of conceptual clarity and agreement reflects the ambivalence to be found in the positioning of special educational needs within the field of education.
- A multiplicity of values reflects the diversity in society and generates debates, multi-layered discourses and alternative ways of looking at educational difficulties.
- The social construction of SEN serves to position large numbers of children as different, indeed deficient, in relation to norms. This affects the practice of teachers and parents as key agents in the education of children.

This research begins by referencing a groundbreaking legal judgement which establishes that negligence can arise in respect of the advice given by teachers to parents. The judgement acknowledges that parents who act as agents for their children rely upon advice proffered by educational professionals. The verbal interactions and exchanges which take place between parents and teachers are highly influential in the choices and decisions which parents make

and take as agents for their children. Verbal interactions lie at the heart of home-school relationships. Yet their influence upon children's life chances have largely been ignored. In the light of the judgement, these interactions now deserve greater attention and scrutiny. Suggested models for more effective practice between parents and teachers stress the importance of listening to the parental voice. This collaborative model of partnership relies upon different yet complementary roles for the professional teacher and the lay parent. The process requires the merging of parents' and teachers' knowledge into negotiations of mutually agreed definitions and strategies. This dynamic model demands an active approach from all, including researchers, to parent-teacher relationships.

Linguistic interactions provide a clear view of the power dynamics which permeate interactions between home and school (Reay, 1998). Reay found that cultural capital, acquired from having information about educational provision, assertiveness and a sense of entitlement, generated resources of confidence. This has relevance for what I have called the duty of care which parents have to their children. This duty of care has roots in constructions of self-identity and parental role constructions and beliefs that parental involvement can influence children's educational outcomes. For the parents of children experiencing difficulties at school, the motivation to help, together with a desire to achieve their desired outcomes for their children, acts as a spur to the acquisition of, and/or activation of, resources. The acquisition of resources, such as the accessing of knowledge previously to be found exclusively within the realm of teachers and educational professionals, is a dimension of parental agency. The dynamic effects of parental agency upon parent-teacher relationships is a factor which has not been fully conceptualised in the literature although its impact upon relationships between parents and teachers should not be underestimated. A study of parental agency proffers opportunities for 'developing an analysis of the ways in which – small and partial though they may be – some parents succeed, through the exercise of individual and/or collective voice, in establishing new understandings and new meanings of what is an 'appropriate' parental role' (Vincent and Tomlinson, 1997, p.373).

Parental agency can be empowering and power can be productive, offering up new opportunities. Many researchers conclude that imbalances of power are the underpinning factor which structures relationships between parents and educational professionals. Some question whether 'the power of educational professionals over their clients is derived from their administrative role within the bureaucracy of the state, not from their professional expertise in its own right' (Armstrong, 1995, p.137). Parents may find themselves involved in difficult interactions with teachers who participate in a range of political and social conflicts within the workplace. Confrontational situations can result in people engaging in situations which open up a whole range of interventions, responses and reactions, for example opportunities for 'expertise trading' (MacLure and Walker, 1999, p.12). Power, when conceptualised as something which is exercised rather than possessed, 'a mutual and indefinite "blackmail"', (Foucault, 1977a, p.159) although not necessarily negative nor indicative of actions against the interests of others, can result in a modification of actions. This understanding of power as something which is exercised rather than possessed, opens up a new dimension to parent-teacher relationships.

This literature review has been instrumental in my decision-making particularly in relation to the research design, methodology and execution. The review highlights the lack of observational data on interactions between parents and teachers and the need for research which interrogates the dynamics inherent within parent-teacher relationships which are centred around children giving cause for concern. Within these relationships there are co-existing yet different realms of meaning which, whilst evolving, affect the purchase that each participant holds on the situation. My research, executed through a series of dyadic interviews, is designed to focus upon specific relationships in particular circumstances. It offers an innovative and distinctive approach to partnership issues by situating pairs of parents and teachers within a social context which is explored and described in terms of its 'internal structure and dynamics, the opportunities it makes available and the constraints it imposes' (Sharp and Green, 1975, p.17). The research aims to go beyond simply capturing the 'surface characteristics of the interaction' to illuminate 'the underlying nature of the social totality in which teachers and parents are embedded', i.e. the latent structure

which underlies the surface structure (Sharp and Green, 1975). My findings will contribute to a frequently overlooked area, that of the 'micro-politics, the messy specifications of particular situations, the challenges and idiosyncrasies of different schools each with their own history and ethos' (Vincent and Tomlinson, 1997, p.368). The research moves away from an exclusive focus upon SEN policy to engage with individual teachers, parents and children. Whilst this may generate further contested perspectives and individual stories which further challenge the notions of a homogeneity of experience, it is, as Armstrong notes, 'through the very a-typicality of individuals, marginalised groups and apparently incidental moments that critical alternative perspectives' are offered (Armstrong, 1999, p.25).

Chapter 3. Sociological Understandings

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 highlighted issues arising from a review of the literature. The extant literature is a resource which furnished a context to my research questions and sharpened the conceptual framework for my thesis. In this chapter I review the sociological understandings which influenced my way of looking at, and making sense of, the research as it progressed.

Throughout the research process, the data collection, analysis, reading and interpretation have been ongoing and cyclical rather than linear. Given the recursive nature of the project it is difficult, nigh impossible, to recall when and where I engaged with specific texts, theories and new ideas. However, what has emerged are a series of lenses through which to view my project. The theories and ideas outlined below have all been instrumental to my analysis, findings and conclusions.

Giddens's structuration theory is presented first because it pre-empts the data analysis stage. It engages with the ontological assumptions of the researcher, the assumptions which shape 'the meaning of the research questions, [...] and the interpretability of research findings' (Crotty, 1998, p.17). Structuration theory deploys a wide range of inter-related issues which link the micro-level action of individuals to macro-level institutional processes. After summarising the main thrust of the theory, I refer briefly to two concepts which arise, namely 'capital' and 'expert systems', whilst a third, power relationships, is considered in relation to the work of Foucault.

The second section moves to sociological understandings whose relevance emerged at the data analysis stage. The research design comprises two studies. The first, a preliminary study, is uniquely involved with parental accounts. It was during the analysis for this study that I became interested in constructivism as a meta-theory. This arose from the resonance I found between Dewey's theory of reflective thinking and the processes described by parents. The significance of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of human development, also briefly reviewed, became apparent during my analysis of the dyadic interviews in the main study.

The third section looks at social theories of learning and provides a detailed account of Wenger's 'community of practice' theory. This theory grew in significance for me as I began to consider its potential as a template for the analysis of parent-teacher relationships.

3.2 Giddens's Structuration theory

Some 20 years of practitioner experience have informed my development of a set of concerns, influenced the mode of inquiry, the choice of empirical settings and the data collection. Therefore, in common with most researchers, I do not approach this project with a blank slate. I bring to it prior understandings gleaned from personal experience as a teacher working in an independent capacity with children giving cause for concern and as a 'broker' who voluntarily liaised between parents, teachers, schools and the LEA. The latter, which included working with both the SEN tribunal and exclusion panels, arose from my involvement with the local dyslexia association which provided support, in the main, for parents and children. I draw also upon my current involvement with an association which I founded with the specific aim of providing a support network for a diverse range of professionals who are involved in working, at different levels and in different capacities, with vulnerable children.

The parent-teacher relationships in this thesis are complex. Both parents and teachers espouse a common purpose, but tensions, contradictions and ambiguities of meanings arise in their practices despite a publicly acknowledged shared commitment and consensus to work together to address children's needs. Parent-teacher relationships do not function as self-contained entities but are located within schools with individual micro-cultures. Teachers' agency is located within schools each of which is itself a small constellation of interconnected practices which have developed within a broader and larger context with specific resources, and constraints. The relational interdependency of agent and world, activity, meaning, learning and knowing, link the activities of people to their socially and culturally structured worlds. People participate in processes which is their practice. They may or may not have common understandings, and relationships among them may be varied and multifaceted demonstrating the 'dynamic, generative nature of both individual lives and

community practices' (Rogoff, 2003, p.78). This perspective offers more than a category type approach to thinking about culture.

Giddens's structuration theory is an ontological theory of social organisation which provides an account of the constitution of social life. It is theory which neither proposes 'empirically relevant accounts of substantive circumstances or events' nor provides a method of theory construction. It is not a "grand theory" for the systematic integration of concepts' (Cohen, 1989, p.1). Structuration theory is concerned with the production of knowledge. It addresses issues which underpin the decisions that social scientists make as to the 'kinds of knowledge it is appropriate to pursue' (Cohen, 1989, p.1). It brings to the fore, and focuses attention upon, those ontological assumptions held by researchers which shape their epistemological and methodological decisions as well as their definitions of empirical problems. Structuration theory provides 'ontological resources for the formulation of empirically orientated theory and research' (Cohen, 1989, p.2)

Giddens views structure and agency not as independent and conflicting elements, but as a mutually constituting duality. The actions of human agents draw on social structure and in so doing both produce and reproduce that social structure. Agency and structure thus become two sides of the same coin, inscribing a process which is both enabling and disabling. Social structures are not material entities, they have no independent existence outside of human action. Structuration theory breaks away from the agency-structure dichotomy and the dualism of the individual and society which preoccupies the positivist, functionalist and structuralist theoretical perspectives as well as some interpretative sociologies such as phenomenology and ethnomethodology. Structuration provides a synthesised model of social systems in which order results from the interaction of agency and structure. Within this model people are essentially knowledgeable about their actions and are aware of the "rules", that is, the structure. Possibilities exist for "breaking" the rules and changing the structure, however complete control is not possible because of unacknowledged conditions or unintended consequences.

Giddens argues that people are constantly involved in reflexive monitoring of their situation and conduct through two types of consciousness, the practical and

the discursive. Structuration theory draws together the 'knowledgeability of human agents' and the 'recursive ordering of social practices' (Giddens, 1984, pp. 2-3). The parents and teachers in this thesis are the 'human agents or actors' (Giddens, 1984, p.xxii) who always 'have the possibility of doing otherwise' (Giddens, 1989, p.258). Their strategies and practices operate as lenses through which to view specific areas of human activity, in this case, parent-teacher relationships. As agents they are involved in decision making and taking sometimes with the expressed anticipation that their acts will "'make a difference" to a pre-existing state of affairs or course of events' (Giddens, 1984, p. 14). As Giddens writes, it is 'in and through their activities agents reproduce the conditions that make these activities possible' (Giddens, 1984, p.2). The stories which parents and teachers tell illuminate their 'beliefs and theories-in-use', (Giddens, 1984, p.335) and present an opportunity for a greater understanding of the conditions, situations or social practices which generate constraints, and thereafter, opportunities.

Structuration theory posits the significance of the 'consciousness, the unconscious and the constitution of day-to-day life' (Giddens, 1984, p.xxii). As a theory it explains how and why individual accounts reflect the partial nature of conscious awareness suggesting elements of tacit knowledge not always directly expressed discursively (Giddens, 1984, p.xxiii). The partial nature of conscious awareness can account for some of the problematics which beset parent-teacher relationships. This can be illustrated in the following way. Most parents acknowledge that teachers work under constraints. This however does not imply consensus as to whether, or how, constraints adequately explain what is perceived as less than ideal educational provision, or which constraints are in play. Similarly, although many teachers acknowledge the complexities of family life some appear reluctant or unable to engage with parental perspectives. Part of this may be explainable by the transitory nature of relationships which many teachers have with their pupils which are in sharp contrast to the relationships between mother and child which are more permanent and non replaceable (Held, 1990, p.298). The obligation that parents have to care for their children differs from the obligations upon teachers working within an educational marketplace constructed by educational legislation in the 1980s, New Labour, and managerial discourses.

Parental agency is framed within personal beliefs relating to parental responsibilities and rights to decision making in the areas of upbringing and education. Families are small societies which contribute towards forming the greater society. Family relationships are usually neither voluntary nor contractual (Held, 1990, p.295). However, 'the intention and goal of mothering (which) is to give of one's care without obtaining a return of a self-interested kind' has different characteristics from a market transaction and cannot be accounted for in terms of individual benefit (Held, 1990, p.298). Rather, an idealised version of the goal of mothering refers to the seeking of the empowerment of children, through the provision of the kind of environment which encourages growth and independence. Maslow (1954) posits a hierarchy of human needs which falls into two groups: deficiency and growth needs. Before being able to achieve, the lower needs of bodily comforts, safety and a sense of being loved and belonging, have to be satisfied first (Maslow, 1954). Although theories of "basic human needs" vary, bonding, which falls in the realm of parenting, tends to be a constant component.

The relationship between parent and child, 'the primary social relation' (Held, 1990, p.303) is necessarily different to the relationship between a child and its teacher who has to consider the needs of many. Teachers often present this argument and refer to the self-interested viewpoint of individual parents when defending themselves against parental accusations of neglect. Although self-interest can explain much of human interaction, a view of individual behaviour and social organisations needs to account equally for 'duty, love and malevolence' (Mansbridge, 1990, p.ix). Mansbridge rejects the notion that human behaviour is based on a narrow-conceived notion of self-interest (Mansbridge, 1990, p.ix), arguing instead that individual actions can embrace both self-interest and altruism. Thus, when individuals decide what is "beneficial" they are taking into account other individuals' interests and perceptions of the common good (Mansbridge, 1990, p.x). Or, as Giddens writes:

No matter how local their specific contexts of action, individuals contribute to and directly promote social influences that are global in their consequences and implications (Giddens, 1991, p.2).

The above illustrates the problematic nature of partial awareness which can emanate from incomplete knowledge of contexts or 'milieux' not directly experienced. It reflects the 'recursive ordering of social practices' (Giddens, 1984, pp.2-3), the inherent tensions arising from conceptually different obligations and positions. It also reflects that 'people know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what they do does' (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983, p.187).

3.2.1 Capital

The broad sociological understanding of 'the actor as socialized and action as governed by social norms, rules and obligations', provides the groundwork for numerous theoretical attempts to account for how action is shaped, constrained and redirected by the social context in which it is embedded and takes place (Coleman, 1998, p. 80). Bourdieu argues that the scholastic yield from educational action depends on the cultural capital previously invested by the family (Bourdieu, 1986, p.244). He describes how family background, social class, commitments to education and accumulated resources from networks of relationships constitute social and cultural 'capital', which can facilitate the obtaining of additional educational resources thereby influencing academic success.

An individual's ability to succeed is partly determined by their position in relation to the field and the cultural, social and economic capital which they can bring to bear on that field (Bourdieu, 1988). Different capitals will be more or less appropriate, with more or less value as "currency", according to their "fit" in particular fields. The power that an individual has to turn a situation to his or her advantage depends on the mobilisation of resources, which both depends upon and affects the range of strategies that individuals are able, or choose, to employ. The degree of access that parents have to a range of 'capitals' is unequal but symbiotically related. The unequal ownership of capital creates an uneven playing field which potentially places some parents and their children in an advantageous position in relation to others whose options are more limited. Whilst parents may seek to be actively included in their child's schooling, the degree to which this will happen will be mediated by the school's response to the strategies they employ. Personal circumstances and variations in the needs that

people have for help (Coleman, 1998, p. 84) mediate the activation of capital. Social capital theory serves as a framework for understanding how rational and purposeful action together with particular social contexts can 'account not only for the actions of individuals in particular contexts, but also for the development of social organization' (Coleman, 1998, p. 80). Social capital, because it adheres in relations among people, functions as a resource for achieving goals and realising interests. As a resource which 'comes about through changes in the relations among persons that facilitate action' (Coleman, 1998, p. 83) the lack of appropriate capital can work to limit the range of action and/or agency and produce different outcomes for individuals.

Some parents and children experience episodes of alienation or even exclusion often activated by events involving contestation or challenge (Lareau and Horvat , 1999, p.38). Supplementing school provision, for example, if it places parents in an ambivalent situation in relation to the school, is a risk-taking venture. Risk-taking can be a response to barriers which effectively operate to exclude, limit or reject parents' participation in the schooling of their children. How parents overcome these problematic situations depends not only upon the possession of appropriate capital, whether social, cultural or economic, but also upon its activation:

In sum, the empirical work on social reproduction, despite the original theoretical richness of Bourdieu's writing, has not sufficiently recognised three important points. First, the value of capital depends heavily on the social setting (or field). Second, there is an important difference between the possession and activation of capital. That is, people who have social and cultural capital may choose to activate capital or not, and they vary in the skill with which they activate it. Third, these two points come together to suggest that rather than being an overly deterministic, continual process, reproduction is jagged and uneven and is continually negotiated by social actors (Lareau and Horvat , 1999, p.38).

Agency can either be enabled or constrained. One of the components of social capital is its capacity, or potential, to supply and provide information thus providing a basis for, and facilitating, certain actions whilst constraining others (Coleman, 1998, p. 85). However, the degree to which individuals are able to activate personal resources in order to overcome barriers to participation and avoid confrontation, is highly variable, usually class related and includes

constructions of self-identity. Self identity, according to Giddens, is a reflexively organised endeavour which occurs amidst a 'puzzling diversity of options and possibilities' (Giddens, 1991, p.3). It is a project which consists of 'the sustaining of coherent, yet consistently revised, biographical narratives' (Giddens, 1991, p.5). A non-confrontational person for example, may opt for an *habitus* of compliance, whilst another may view the erection of potential barriers as a personal spur to overcoming challenges and resolving dilemmas.

3.2.2 Expert systems

Dilemmas become acute during fateful moments in an individual's life (Giddens, 1991, pp.142-143). They are transition points which have major implications for self-identity. Fateful moments, by definition, are consequential and:

...where consequential decisions are concerned, individuals are often stimulated to devote the time and energy necessary to generate increased mastery of the circumstances they confront (Giddens, 1991, p.143).

Motivated by their children's educational difficulties, some parents become involved in a personal learning process which involves seeking additional advice and information external to the schools. These parents utilise 'the knowledge incorporated in modern forms of expertise (which) is in principle available to everyone, had they but the available resources, time and energy to acquire it' (Giddens, 1991, p.30). In so doing, parents embark upon a journey of potential empowerment which will permit a greater control over circumstances and situations.

'Reskilling' is the term used by Giddens for the reacquisition of knowledge or skills, the weighing up and balancing of claims made by different approaches which allows for reasonably informed choices to be made (Giddens, 1991, p.141). Reskilling is always partial, situationally variable and responds to specific requirements of context:

Individuals are likely to reskill themselves in greater depth where consequential transitions in their lives are concerned or fateful decisions are to be made [...]. Reskilling, however, is always partial and liable to be affected by the 'revisable' nature of expert knowledge and by internal dissensions between experts (Giddens, 1991, p.7).

Billington suggests that both education and psychology have encouraged the development of the notion of the expert:

Both these enclosures are filled now with experts who are paid for particular forms of knowledge, supposedly based on scientific evidence about children which is often presented in the form of tables, measurements and categorizations. Too often, however, the knowledge is based, not on science but on the power vested in the position of the expert to lay claim not merely to science, but to fact, truth and reason. In performing their science, the expert is often allowed to escape individual scrutiny as they too are required to lose their individual identity within the social power relations (Billington, 2000, p.29).

Trust, upon which expert systems depend, lies uneasily in the 'social space linking individual activities and expert systems' (Giddens, 1991, p.7). Trust, generates a leap of faith in experts who, although:

...not a clearly distinguishable stratum in the population - may proceed within their technical work by means of a resolute concentration on a narrow specialist area, paying little attention to broader consequences or implications'(Giddens, 1991, p.31).

The combination of personal and (sometimes newly acquired) professional knowledge can spawn a questioning of professional expertise. Parents (amongst others) can, and do, equip themselves to question, and monitor professional practice and decisions, and to subject professionals to individual scrutiny.

3.2.3 Power relationships

Giddens argues that human agents always 'have the possibility of doing otherwise' (Giddens, 1989, p. 258), however problems can arise in the translation of empowerment into conviction and action (Giddens, 1991, p.141). Giddens adopts a relational rather than deterministic model of power, suggesting, like Foucault (1979) that power is only effective to the extent that individuals allow it to influence their actions. In this model the operation of power relationships relies upon the compliance of subordinates: 'All forms of dependence offer some resources whereby those who are subordinate can influence the activities of their superiors' (Giddens, 1984, p.16).

A Foucauldian conceptualisation of power produces a reading of relationships which can be understood in terms of constraints, empowerment, and opportunity:

We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it *excludes*, it *represses*, it *censors*, it *abstracts*, it *masks*, it *conceals*. In fact, power produces; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production (Foucault, 1977a, p.194, original emphasis).

In the context of parent-teacher relationships and the difficulties which can affect children's education and their experience of school, Foucault opens up the possibility for a range of productive interventions, for example opportunities for 'expertise trading' (MacLure and Walker, 1999, p.12). Accessing, and deploying knowledge is a practice that can generate 'action and participation' (Popkewitz and Brennan, 1998, p.5). Collaborative and participative frameworks predicated upon co-agency, equality and a sharing of knowledge and information depend upon a 'power with' (as against a 'power over') philosophy (Ginsburg, 1997, p.9). The deployment of knowledge is fundamental to this conceptualisation which challenges, or builds upon, traditional academic discourses which have, in the main, positioned parents as powerless in relation to professionals. This shift moves the focus away from a singular focus upon the repressive attributes of power and towards potentially more productive relationships. This opens up a space in which to consider constructive partnerships based upon equality and mutuality grounded in the shared belief that all knowledge is partial.

Schools can be read as the site of control strategies, as for example, when teachers act as gatekeepers of privileged knowledge. Foucault writes that the outcomes of particular interactions shape, alter, or determine the actions or behaviour of people in order to make them more governable or manageable. This 'governmentality', as he calls it, is a disciplinary technique, a mechanism for excluding or limiting the participation of individuals. The exercising of personal choice and the seeking of solutions can invoke acts of resistance which are not necessarily 'something that the individual invents by himself' (Foucault, 1991b, p.11). Some strategies, including those which function as repair mechanisms, also function specifically as expressions of resistance to exclusionary forces.

Acts of resistance by an individual can be understood as a working out of the 'patterns that he finds in his culture and which are proposed, suggested, imposed on him by his culture, his society and his social group' (Foucault, 1991b, p.11). Acts can be representations of resistance to constraints generated by certain

discourses and practices, or to attempts to marginalise individuals by limiting their potential to participate equally in decision making. The parental accounts in this thesis which evidence problematic encounters with teachers support previous research findings in the field of relationships between professionals and lay people. This version, which reconstructs relationships as asymmetrics of power and status, concludes that teachers and schools can be (re)constructed as agencies of regulation and control over homes. This construction is grounded in discourses which describe power as something which is owned or wielded by certain groups who are generally favoured in decision-making. This positions parents as “powerless/disempowered” within a context of domination and subordination. Different understandings of what it means to be a “professional” or to act in a “professional” manner can result in problematic “them and us” scenarios. The traditional view of professionalism privileges status, autonomy and authority. This stance, which serves to embroil teachers in webs of power which distances them from parents and others (Ginsburg, 1997), is unlikely to result in effective consensual partnerships between parents and teachers.

3.3 Constructivism.

I now turn to consider the specific relevance and application of the constructivist philosophy to this thesis. No single paradigm can adequately describe the range of teachers’ approaches to learning. Some teachers may find collaborative practice problematic, challenging and elusive, choosing to rely instead upon what Dewey calls ‘intuition’ rather than reflection (Dewey, 1932). In this sense, intuition is psychological and indicative of formed habit rather than thoughtful judgement (Dewey, 1932, p.124). Such teachers may overtly adopt a technical rationalist approach to learning, seeing knowledge as something to be passively absorbed and processed, an instrumental and instructional process which ignores the everyday accumulation of knowledge through less formal systems.

Other teachers adopt a constructivist philosophy in the sense that they tend to construct their own knowledge and accommodate new ideas through their interactions with pupils (and their parents), colleagues and other professionals. This reflects an understanding of the nature of knowledge as being inherently partial, and implies that articulation, involving reflection and an exchange of ideas, is always necessary:

...if we removed human activity from the system of social relationships and social life, it would not exist...the human individual's activity is a system in the system of social relation. It does not exist without these relations (Leont'ev A.N, 1981, pp. 46-47).

From Leont'ev's perspective, both the internal and external dimensions of activity are designed to achieve goals and or satisfy motives and problem-solve. For some teachers, as for some parents, an underlying constructivist orientated philosophy acts as a personal 'engine of action' (Coleman, 1998, p.80), that is, the 'internal springs of action that give the actor a purpose or direction' (Coleman, 1998, p.80). This philosophical orientation values the social co-construction of knowledge and believes that learners must play an active role in constructing their own meaning. Knowledge, from this perspective, is viewed as having both individual and social components and evolves through and from social participation and negotiation with others. For teachers who embrace this approach, the learning process which is individual and emergent, serves to mediate and refine practice. It may be that the critical and reflective approach characterises the teacher who sees his or her role as understanding learners' needs and potential as learners rather than as a deliverer, in a technical sense, of a given curriculum.

Many, perhaps most, teachers employ a range of eclectic approaches constituting a complex landscape of pedagogical practice. These different philosophical viewpoints subsequently infuse classrooms with a range of individual characteristics and idiosyncrasies which reflect teachers' pedagogical knowing, tastes and preferences. A teacher's individual practice, broadly speaking, is the product of interwoven philosophical and epistemological frameworks and beliefs:

The rational and emotional are part of each other, and never completely separable. Both are located in our sometimes deeply held and often tacit beliefs' (Hodkinson, 2001, p.9).

Assuming that theory and action are related, a scrutiny of teachers' practices will reveal how 'personal theories' equate with 'professional thinking' (Tann, 1993, p.56).

The specific relevance of the constructivist approach to this thesis lies in its philosophical slant which opposes the idea of the teacher as principal and sole actor with pupils, and parents, as the passive recipients of instructional strategies. Constructivism is about a process of active engagement which produces knowledge and understanding. The significance of the co-construction of knowledge, or otherwise, is two fold. Firstly, within a technological era unlimited information is within the easy reach of many. Secondly, the rhetoric of “partnership” which is now embedded within the primary school ethos (Cullingford and Morrison, 1999, p.253), demands the sharing of information. The relentless press for more accountability from public institutions and growing accessibility to information in a technology-based society have rendered the boundaries of the school more permeable and more transparent, part of a process which Fullan describes as both ‘inevitable and desirable’:

It is desirable because in post-modern society you can no longer get the job of education done unless you combine forces. It has become too complex for any one group (like teachers) to do alone. These new ways of partnering are threatening and complex [...] a process that is a far more dangerous journey at the outset (when you are working from a base of mutual ignorance) than it is once you are underway (Fullan, 2001, p.197).

For Dewey, and others, knowledge and ideas are the product of social contexts which allow learners to draw and construct meaning from their own experiences. The constructivist philosophy is premised upon an understanding of learning as a social activity which is dependent upon social interaction. Both the socially constructed nature of knowledge and the negotiation of meaning evolve through participation within different communities of practice (Scribner, 1985; Cole, 1990). This understanding of how learning takes place is often referred to as the ‘situated cognition’ or ‘situated learning’ perspective.

At one level, all teaching and learning, however operationalised, can be considered as constructivist since mental activity is involved. However, the growing literature relating to constructivist instruction within the classroom, ‘constructivism in practice’, proffers specific indicators which differentiate between the social co-construction of knowledge and the individual cognitive process. Windschitl presents a theoretical analysis of constructivism in practice

by building a framework of dilemmas (Windschitl, 2002, p.132) and considers how problematics could be recast in positive terms 'essentially as the attributes of a classroom teacher empowered by knowledge, experience and support' (Windschitl, 2002, p.157). His framework uses the conceptual, pedagogical, political and cultural as frames of reference culminating in a model of a constructivist classroom wherein increasing numbers of participants become involved in the broadening of networks of communication.

'Constructivism in practice':

... involves phenomena distributed across multiple contexts of teaching. It is the complex of concerns and invested activity that binds together teachers, students, administrators, parents and community members as they participate, in various ways, in reform-oriented education (Windschitl, 2002, p.132).

The 'ambiguities, tensions and compromises that arise among stakeholders in the educational enterprise' (Windschitl, 2002, p.131) render the constructivist project, with its culture, practices and beliefs, a 'risk-taking venture with political implications'. The constructivist approach, with its emphasis upon revisiting ideas, reflection and collaboration, can conflict with the values that are traditionally held in schools (Calderhead and Gates, 1993, pp.3-4). One of the challenges that the "constructivist" teacher faces is the usurping of entrenched school cultures which include the 'being students and teacher' (Windschitl, 2002, p.150) syndrome alongside 'the professional teacher and lay parent' syndrome. Reflections of this appear in numerous research reports which, albeit inadvertently, serve to contribute to a dominant culture of compliance (for parents) and the positioning of pupils as being passive rather than active in their own learning.⁴

⁴ A case study (Cullingford, C. and Morrison, M. 1999), claims to explore the 'complexity and delicacy' of the issues involved in relationships between parents and schools using 'wide ranging, confidential and anonymous' interviews 'giving the participants every encouragement to express their views' (p.255). The interviewees were not made aware that the focus of the research was on parent-school relations. Significant players (sic), that is the parent/teacher liaison officers, headteachers, teachers and classroom assistants were interviewed individually and participated in focus groups. Because the children and parents are only afforded the final line in the methodology section: 'in addition, children and parents were observed in different circumstances', (p.255) their importance to the project reads as an afterthought. Unsurprisingly perhaps, 'the results are both clear and consistent [...] what was striking was not the complexity of the findings but their coherence'. Although the conclusion notes that 'parents are being steadily distanced

The standards movement with its (re)distribution of power (Windschitl, 2002, p.154), and the meeting of expectations in general are further sites of risk. The ground-breaking journey towards new forms of partnering is therefore not an easy one:

The pathways and obstacles in getting there involve working through the discomfort of each other's presence until new patterns of relationships are established (Fullan, 2001, p.213).

'Partnering' (Fullan, 2001), particularly between parents and teachers, involves a commitment to include knowledge produced from outside formal educational institutions. This requires teachers to engage with a 'whole gamut of new skills, relationships and orientations' and to adopt a position which fundamentally changes the essence, or perception, of their professionalism: 'this new professionalism is collaborative, not autonomous; open rather than closed; outward-looking rather than insular; and authoritative but not controlling' (Fullan, 2001, p.265).

For many individuals, whether teachers or parents, the motivation of additional information and greater comprehension acts as a spur for breaking new ground. New information connects to existing ideas to form 'meaningful knowledge' which, because it is tentative and subject to constant revision, itself becomes a tool for further constructions (Windschitl, 2002, p.136). My interest in the constructivist philosophy developed directly from the resonance I found between the reflective thinking described by Dewey and the processes being described by parents in the preliminary study. Constructivism offers pedagogical guidelines for teachers in relation to problems of practice. It offers an approach to learning grounded in the belief that learning is an active and constructive activity, a process of meaning making rather than of knowledge transmission. My appropriation of the term 'constructivism' serves to reflect a general approach to understanding social activity rather than as a normative and prescriptive model of "good" practice. Likewise, my deployment of Wenger's 'community of practice' theory, (see section 3.4 below), to examine parent-teacher relationships

from schools, that the rhetoric about parental involvement continues, both as part of primary school philosophy and as part of the legislative measures being imposed by the government', the voices of the parents and children remain unheard.

functions as a tool for empirical analysis and description of social activity rather than as a normative model.

I turn next to the work of Dewey, who is often considered the originator of the 'reflective thought' movement.

3.3.1 Dewey and 'Reflective Thinking'

My analysis begins by mapping the processes and actions undertaken by individual parents who, by deciding to seek and augment what the school has to offer, exercise a particular form of agency on behalf of their children. The parents speak at length about their children's behaviour patterns, their own unanswered questions, times of anxiety and uncertainty, and the need to find solutions to end their perplexity. Their accounts often reflect a distrust of expert systems and illustrate how, 'in circumstances of uncertainty and multiple choice the notions of trust and risk have particular application' (Giddens, 1991, p.3). Giddens writes that doubt permeates every day life and that:

Modernity [...] insists that all knowledge takes the form of hypothesis: claims which may very well be true, but which are in principle always open to revision and may have at some point to be abandoned (Giddens, 1991, p.3).

Dewey provides a useful scaffold or framework for understanding the motivation for, decisions made and actions taken by the parents I interviewed. Dewey differentiates between 'reflective thinking' and 'thinking' by indicating two sub-processes. The first entails a state of perplexity, hesitation or doubt, and the second involves an act or search or investigation directed towards bringing to light further facts which serve to corroborate or to nullify the suggested belief (Dewey, 1997, p.9):

Reflection involves not simply a sequence of ideas, but a *consequence-* a consecutive ordering in such a way that each determines the next as its proper outcome, while each in turn leans back on its predecessors. [...] Each phase is a step from something to something – technically speaking, it is a term of thought (Dewey, 1997, original italics p.3).

The adoption of reflective practice as a pedagogy has been at its most influential in those professions, or semi-professions, characterised by a largely female workforce in the public sector (Clegg, 1999, p.171). These professions, namely

nursing, teaching and social work are characterised by their increasingly limited scope for autonomy and independence. Within the medical profession, reflective practice is linked to accountability and is a compulsory part of the professional development undertaken by nurses on a regular basis. The growth in popularity of 'reflective practice' as a popular movement, particularly in respect of teacher education and its potential application to the work of teachers in schools, has led to problems of terminology (Calderhead, 1989; Copeland et al., 1993; Zeichner, 1993; Hatton and Smith, 1995).

Dewey however sought to promote a scientific approach to intellectual development based on the belief that knowledge is strictly relative to human interaction with the world. Dewey defined 'reflective thought' as:

Active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends (Dewey, 1997, p.6).

The process contains a series of distinctly logical steps. Beginning with a felt difficulty characterised by perplexity, the second stage involves finding the location and definition of a problem followed by the suggestion of possible solution. The final stages of the process involve the development by reasoning of the bearings of the suggestion and further observation and experiment leading to its acceptance or rejection which is the conclusion of belief or disbelief (Dewey, 1997, p.72). In essence therefore, Dewey describes a process of problem solving, a linked progression of ideas, generated in the first instance by the awareness of a possible problem (however tentative or exploratory), operationalised or characterised by inquiry and the gathering of information or knowledge in order to identify the problem, hypothesis making, the seeking of tentative solutions or resolution of the situation or problem.

The partial nature of facts or conditions, described by Dewey as 'isolated, fragmented or discrepant' leads to perplexity which stimulates reflection:

In cases of striking novelty or unusual perplexity, the difficulty, however, is likely to present itself at first as a shock, as emotional disturbance, as a more or less vague feeling of the unexpected, of something queer, strange, funny, or disconcerting. In such instances, there are necessary observations deliberately calculated to bring to light just what is the trouble, or to make clear the specific character of the problem (Dewey, 1997,

p.74).

Reflection involves inductive and deductive movement back and forth, as links are sought between fragmented details. The process facilitates the move from fragmented details to a more connected view of the situation (Dewey, 1997, p.79). It involves two levels of observation at the beginning and at the end of the process. In the beginning it serves to determine more definitely and precisely the nature of the difficulty to be dealt with. At the end of the process observation tests 'the value of some hypothetically entertained conclusion' (Dewey, 1997, p.77).

People adopt a range of strategies as they seek what Dewey refers to as additional evidence/new data/corroborations in order to gain a more precisely defined understanding of the problem. They may draw upon a range of resources and communicate with many professionals. In so doing they demonstrate that tentative acceptance, or what Dewey calls a 'hypothetically entertained conclusion', is a characteristic of the ongoing search for an explanation which fits all the data:

Till we have reached a final conclusion, rejection and selection must be tentative or conditional. We select the things that we hope or trust are cues to meaning (Dewey, 1997, p.104).

The processes of researching, locating and defining problems often lead to uncharted waters. People have to make decisions and choices guided only by subjective judgement, for, in the words of Dewey: 'No hard and fast rules decide whether a meaning suggested is the right and proper meaning to follow up. [...] There is no label on any given idea or principle which says automatically, "Use me in this situation" – as the magic cakes of Alice in Wonderland were inscribed "Eat me" (Dewey, 1997, p.106). The asking of questions in problematic or indeterminate situations engenders answers which in turn stimulate further questions. In this way inquiry and questioning merge into synonymous terms (Dewey, 1938, p.105).

3.3.2 Ecological systems

The parents, teachers and children who are the subject of this thesis, are concurrently involved in more than one community or microsystem at work and at home and are subject to the influence of different ecosystems. It is useful

therefore to view parent-teacher relationships from the sociocultural view of development proposed by Bronfenbrenner in which an ecological approach is taken to the analysis of human relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For Bronfenbrenner, the primary units of analysis are environmental systems and settings analysed in terms of their structure. Context, that is, in this case, the role of the school in understanding educational difficulties, and setting, that is home and school, can be instrumental in explicating parent-teacher relationships.

Bronfenbrenner offers a sociocultural view of development, constructed around five environmental systems, which work as 'a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls' (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p.3). His taking account of 'aspects of the environment beyond the immediate situation containing the setting' is important because it facilitates the drawing of wider conclusions about the structural features of society which influence (the inappropriate) behaviour of children (Garner, 1994, p.109). This linkage between environment and behaviour has implications for relationships between parents, teachers and children, and therefore, their joint practice.

For Bronfenbrenner, the capacity of a setting, for example the home or school, to function as what he calls 'a context for development' depends upon the social interconnections between settings. Included in this is what he refers to as 'intersetting knowledge' which is information which exists in one setting about the other. An unintentional function of social networks is their capacity to serve as channels for transmitting information or attitudes about one setting to the other, i.e. the 'grapevine'. This kind of social capital can have both positive and negative effects and consequences. The 'grapevine', for example, can be the conduit for providing access to resources which may come into play in the establishing of reciprocal parent-teacher relationships. On the other hand, the impact and effect of the intersetting knowledge characteristic of the 'grapevine' can be overwhelming to vulnerable families.

Bronfenbrenner describes a circular formation of human experience which is multilayered, reflecting the way that individuals exist within layers of relationships and influences. Individuals may be involved in more than one community or microsystem at the same time, for example, at work and at home, and be

subjected to the influence of different ecosystems. Bronfenbrenner calls the 'microsystem' those relationships, activities, roles, and influences which are closest to the individual or in the immediate environment, for example, relationships within the family. Each family may contain more than one microsystem of relationships, and the subsequent interactions will change the individuals directly involved. The second layer, the 'mesosystem' comprises microsystems which interact, for example, home and school. Mismatches in the linkages across multiple contexts may create difficulties or advantages for individuals. The third layer is the 'exosystem' which comprises environments or networks of external relationships and roles which may be indirectly influential, for example, the extended family, a significant other or the workplace. The whole is contained within the 'macrosystem', comprising shared beliefs, rules, values and practices, in other words, the cultural and social structures of groups of people. A fifth layer, the 'chronosystem' relates to patternings of environmental events and transitions throughout life.

Bronfenbrenner's work highlights what he calls 'ecological transitions', those events which occur throughout the life span, resulting in (or from) changes in role or setting, or both, wherein changes within the structure of the family produce second order effects. The development of a child is, according to him, most greatly influenced by the bi-directional dyads, or two-person system, of mother-child, father-child and mother-father (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Divorce, the break up of the family and the change of roles implicit within the breakdown of a family is one example of bi-directional relationships and interactions across and between systems.

In such events, it can be difficult to arrive at a consensus, whether between parent and parent or between parent and teacher, as to "what matters" and to where priorities lay. Negotiation of meaning is however an integral part of the informal 'joint activity dyad', in Bronfenbrenner's terms, which form when people pursue a shared enterprise over time. As such the 'joint activity dyad', or 'community of practice', (see below) can be conceptualised as an emergent structure involving collective learning with both developmental and transformative potential for all involved in the education of children.

3.4 Communities of practice

The 'community of practice' describes a social setting in which learning occurs through dialogue. This dialogue provides the means for the potential sharing and co-construction of narratives, reflection, interpretation and negotiation with others (Lave, 1988). Wenger(1998) develops the ethnographic studies of learning in various workplace settings, the Yucatec midwives, Vai and Gola tailors, US Navy quartermasters, meat-cutters and non-drinking alcoholics in Alcoholics Anonymous (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Lave and Wenger stress the commonalities and differences among the different cases they present suggesting that the meat-cutters fail as a form of effective apprenticeship (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 65). Wenger's subsequent development of the 'community of practice' theory is based upon observations of, and interviews with, staff working in a medical claims-processing company (Wenger, 1998).

Wenger's work proffers conceptual support for the analysis of the formation of learning communities within which joint knowledge production emerges clearly as a resource. Learning is understood as a process of social participation: 'building complex social relationships around meaningful activities requires genuine practices in which taking charge of learning becomes the enterprise of a community' (Wenger, 1998, p.272). The sharing of narratives and interchange of ideas and negotiation of meaning amongst participants are the prime characteristics of the situated learning perspective which argues that a cognitivist focus on abstract knowledge overlooks the tacit dimensions of other kinds of "practice". Situated learning proposes that individual learning is emergent and involves opportunities for participation in the practices of a community as well as the development of an identity which provides 'a sense of belonging and commitment' (Handley et al., 2006, p.642). This kind of practice produces knowledge which is 'provisional, mediated and socially constructed' (Handley et al., 2006); (Blackler, 1995).

Wenger's theory provides a broad conceptual framework which links the issues of community, social practice, meaning and identity to the relationships that people make as they share in an enterprise over time. Learning as an expression of social participation is not restricted:

... just to local events of engagement in certain activities with certain people, but to a more encompassing process of being active participants in the *practices* of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities (Wenger, 1998, p.4, original italics).

Learning, or expertise, is defined according to what is recognised within the relevant 'community of practice'. Situated practice and learning is about engaging in a communal task in an effective way. Wenger's conceptualisation of the 'community of practice', wherever and however located, assumes the possibility of utilising dialogue to develop a common language of negotiated meaning and an understanding of artifacts. He identifies three essential characteristics of a 'community of practice', mutual engagement, a joint enterprise and the shared repertoire of negotiable resources, understandings, routines, actions and artifacts accumulated over time (Wenger, 1998, pp. 125-126).

Wenger's relational view of persons, their actions and the world locates participation at the core of a theory of learning. Participation, based on the interchange of ideas whilst attempting to problem-solve, requires active engagement in a process wherein understanding and experience constantly interact to the point of being mutually constitutive. Participation in social practice focuses on the person as person-in-the-world, a member of a socialcultural community (Wenger, 1998, p.52).

Participation involves 'the possibility of mutual recognition', even though the mutuality implied:

...does not, however entail equality or respect. The relations [...] are mutual in the sense that participants shape each other's experiences of meaning. [...] But these are not relations of equality. In practice, even the meanings of inequality are negotiated in the context of this process of mutual recognition' (Wenger, 1998, p.56).

Mutuality, in Wenger's sense, involves 'the possibility of developing an "identity of participation", that is, an identity constituted through relations of participation'. This is a different concept to collaboration and can involve 'all kinds of relations, conflictual as well as harmonious, intimate as well as political, competitive as well as co-operative' (Wenger, 1998, p.56). Mutuality in this context is a concept linked to recognition and identity. It builds upon constructions of effective practice in

partnerships which are predicated upon inclusive participatory frameworks, collaboration and supportive dialogues.

Within a 'community of practice' individuals can move from an original position of "newcomer" to become a "core practitioner" through a process of changing levels of participation and a process akin to an apprenticeship. In Wenger's terms, a trajectory of legitimate peripheral participation leads to a position where "expertise" is recognised by other practitioners. The process can result in the acquisition of transferable knowledge and skills which can transform communities. This process of moving from peripheral participation to full membership of a community involves identity work, motivation, changing social relationships, and both formal and informal learning. Individuals who move from peripheral to full membership of a 'community of practice' invoke a change in the practice of others as well as changing the nature of the community. This trajectory implies that the learner has come to behave in ways that are recognised as competent within a particular community. However, a position of peripherality can be a positive one, since the move towards greater participation carries within it the possibility of gaining access to sources for understanding through growing involvement. A position of peripherality becomes disempowering if it is non-dynamic and prevents individuals from greater involvement and participation.

Although practices are frequently identified and referred to as 'communities of practice' this is often done in an unreflective way. Having briefly outlined Wenger's theory, I turn now to some of the issues which appear to have been inadequately treated within the theoretical framework. Many of these issues are reconsidered again in the final chapter in relation to my own research.

The phrase 'community of practice' carries with it a degree of ambiguity and the related literature is 'still evolving' and 'hardly coherent' (Lindkvist, 2005, p.1191). Although the theoretical strength of situated learning theory has been adopted by many researchers, the many conceptual issues which remain undeveloped in the literature has resulted in considerable variation around how 'community of practices' are both described and characterised (Handley et al., 2006, p.646).

The term "participation", which is central to situated learning theory, generates further ambiguities within the literature. Whilst "participation" clearly involves action in the sense of taking part, it also conveys a sense of endurance which separates it from 'a mere engagement in practice' (Wenger, 1998, p.57). This raises the question of how participation differs from engagement and at which point an individual participates in a 'community of practice' rather than engages in practice. The assumption in the literature is that participation entails a sense of belonging, mutual understanding and progression along a trajectory. It has been argued that Wenger's use of the qualifying terms 'peripheral', 'full' and 'marginal' to describe variations in the degree of participation gives rise to some definitional confusion and potentially conflates those who participate, however marginally, with those who, technically do not (Handley et al., 2006, p.650). Whilst it is accepted that some individuals elect to remain peripheral, other marginal members are individuals who are prevented from full participation. It may be that a greater number of individuals are participating at the margins than is acknowledged in some of the literature (Handley et al., 2006).

Boylan (undated) describes the 'analytic perspective' (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.40) which describes learning as participation in 'communities of practice' as a distinct philosophy which incorporates an epistemological and ontological account of the nature of knowing and being in the world. He describes a second aspect as the sociological description of the forms of participation and the nature of the groupings which emerge through the evolution of social practices (Boylan, p.2, undated).

Lindkvist (2005), develops an alternative, though complementary, view of the 'community of practice' in the form of 'the collectivity of practice' an example of which is a project-based team. Such a group will not be sufficiently developed to qualify as a 'community of practice' because of its temporary and quickly established nature. While 'communities of practice' depend on shared enterprise, mutual engagement and shared repertoires, collectivities of practice rely on individual knowledge, agency and goal-directed interactions. This idea that some communities are more enduring than others is also reflected in the description of 'fast and slow' communities (Roberts, 2006, p.632).

Holmes, differentiating between 'the community of practice' and other social networks, writes that a 'social network and a 'community of practice' can be differentiated by the nature of the contact which defines them. A social network requires QUANTITY of interactions; a community of practice requires QUALITY of interaction' (Holmes, 1999, p.180, original emphasis). Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, in their research on language and gender, refer to a 'community of practice' as 'an aggregate of people who, united by a common enterprise, develop and share ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs and values – in short, practices (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1999, p.186). The 'community of practice' can develop from any formally or informally constituted enterprise but once launched, it develops its own way of being and its own trajectory. This does not mean that 'communities of practice' are necessarily egalitarian or consensual – simply that their membership and practices grow out of mutual engagement (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992). The development of shared practices and activities within the group members indicates the extent to which members belong to the group. Mutual engagement and learning are at the heart of the 'community of practice' which is defined both by its membership and by the practice in which the membership engages. In exploring the interaction between art and design and museum and gallery education Herne (2006) concludes that 'trans-institutional and inter professional communities of practice can be established that have the potential to generate new forms of engagement, shared repertoire and joint enterprise' (Herne, 2006, p.1). He reminds us that not all communities are 'communities of practice'. Three key dimensions, mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire are necessary conditions for recognition in Wenger's theoretical construct, therefore 'people who work alongside each other in a department without mutual engagement cannot be said to be part of a community of practice' (Herne, 2006, p.2).

In the context of support groups for home-educators, the same three key dimensions help to explain the dynamics of support groups which take many forms, ranging from loose informal one-off meetings through internet chat rooms, newsletters, informal contact by phone through to more formal regular activities in a particular venue (Barson, 2004). Barson concludes that home education constitutes a constellation of 'communities of practice' as defined by

Wenger, and that although groups may share a general enterprise, in this case the education of children out of school, each group 'reflects and is created by the specific needs of those involved' (Barson, 2004, p.2). The variations in mutual engagement and shared repertoires across groups suggest that the 'community of practice' framework needs to be adapted to deal with a wide diversity of groups. This research makes a useful contribution because the support group, like the parent-teacher relationship, is not a formally defined institution with a generally well-known structure. Like each individual parent-teacher relationship, the support groups have 'no defined structure, no formal obligations, no agreed way to do things and their joint enterprise may not be made explicit' (Barson, 2004, p.7). Each group is characterised by its own joint enterprise, ways of engaging and shared repertoire. Similarities and differences between groups imply that each group, like each parent-teacher relationship, may be a discrete 'community of practice', membership of which will be self selecting (Wenger 1998).

Paechter writes that 'a community of practice is, put simply, a community engaging in a shared practice' (Paechter, 2003a, p. 542). She draws upon Lave and Wenger's (1991) initial idea of a 'community of practice' in order to explore the implication that children and young people learn what it is to be masculine or feminine through a kind of apprenticeship within particular, localised communities (Paechter, 2003b). In that context, boys are viewed as apprentice men, and girls as apprentice women (Paechter, 2003a). Paechter argues that the relative lack of exploration into the power relations both within and between communities is something which is particularly germane to the study of gender and represents a serious weakness within the literature. She argues that relations within and between localised masculine and feminine communities of practice contribute to and underpin power relations within and between wider practices (Paechter, 2003b). This is endorsed by Herne who argues that 'A characteristic of the processes of the community of practice is that strategies are used to either promote or prevent access. This is a play of power relations and can be relatively transparent or opaque (Herne, 2006, p.15). The discussion about power continues in chapter 9.

These few examples amongst many serve to indicate not only that there are different types of knowledge creating and transferring communities but also that the 'community of practice' itself can be seen as heterogeneous across several dimensions including geographic spread, lifecycle and pace of evolution. On a global level, size and dispersal may mean that members of a more global community may rarely if ever meet, leading to focal "practices" being somewhat diffuse (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1999). On a more local level, the 'community of practice' is about people engaging directly with others involved in developing shared ways of understanding of how to do and think about things.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the epistemology which provides the links between my empirical data, my analysis and subsequent interpretation of the findings and the conclusions of my research. Reading the work of Giddens, Dewey, Bourdieu, Foucault and Bronfenbrenner improved my sociological understandings and contributed to my increasing understanding of the data and its subsequent analysis.

Social theories of learning, and in particular the work of Wenger, provided me with a framework for the analysis of the parent-teacher relationships under discussion. Wenger's theory builds upon the work of several cognitive and constructivist theorists, (Vygotsky, 1934; Piaget, 1954; Bandura, 1977; Wertsch, 1985; Engestrom, 1987). It brings together the aspirations expressed in Dewey's description of 'conjoint communicated experience' (Dewey, 1961, p.87), the Warnock recommendations for parent-teacher relationships (Department of Education and Science, 1978, p.151) and Pugh's description of partnership as a working relationship characterised by a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect and the willingness to negotiate (Pugh, 1989, p.5). All of these suggest a model for partnership which closely resembles a 'community of practice' (Wenger, 1998).

The heuristic deployment of Wenger's theoretical and conceptual framework to examine parent-teacher relationships serves to extend the notion of a community of learners beyond the immediate classroom walls, to encompass all involved in the fostering of learning, and the sorting out of children's difficulties at school. Theoretically, a 'community of practice' offers members the possibility of

changing, or adapting, their existing frames of reference, assumptions and theories. It could function as a mechanism for change, a way of arriving at a place where we can recognise 'what we do and what we know, as well as on our ability to connect meaningfully to what we don't do and don't know – that is, to the contributions and knowledge of others' (Wenger, 1998, p.76).

Chapters 2 and 3 have identified the conceptual and theoretical components of the thesis framework. The next chapter addresses the methodology and method that I use to explore the potential of Wenger's theory in relation to the articulation of parent-teacher relationships as played out in schools today from the perspective of those involved.

Chapter 4. Methodological Choices, Research Design and Methods

4.1 Introduction

In the previous two chapters I have described how ideas presented in the literature helped to sharpen my conceptual framework and how sociological theories aided my understanding of the data. In this chapter I provide a rationale for both the research paradigm and my choice of methodology. I provide a detailed account of the research design and the methods used to operationalise the investigation. My intention is to provide sufficient detail of the method used for another trained researcher, or 'a reasonably knowledgeable colleague' to be able to replicate the data collection and method of analysis (Lindsay, 1995). This chapter includes a rationale for three methodological decisions which directly impact upon the research design. The first relates to the positioning of the children in the research. The second is my decision to look at the situations when children generate worries and concerns for their parents and teachers rather than looking at children designated as having "special educational needs". The third methodological decision is my adoption of Wenger's 'community of practice' as an ideal type.

The chapter begins with an outline of the methodological challenge and discusses the qualitative/quantitative divide. Next I turn to ethical considerations and discuss my decision to employ a participatory and dyadic approach to the data collection. This is followed by my rationale for the positioning of the children in the research. I then turn to the research design which comprises two interconnected studies, a preliminary and Main Study. These constitute the empirical work of this thesis. I outline the objectives of the preliminary study, detail the parental sample and introduce the children whose difficulties generate parental concern and agency. I then move to the Main Study, describe how I located the participants and introduce the parents, children and teachers. Some indicators of the socio-economic status of the cohort of parent participants, and information about the teaching experience and specialist training in SEN of the teachers are provided. My rationale for adopting Wenger's 'community of practice' as an ideal type concludes this section of the research design.

The final part of this chapter describes the methods employed to operationalise the research, namely the pilot studies, the interview procedures and schedules and my use of N5 as a research tool to aid analysis.

4.2 The challenge

Boundaries between home and school have increasingly become more blurred, driven by political, practitioner and academic consensus that harmony between home and school is in children's best educational interests (Edwards and Alldred, 2000, p.437). Therefore research such as mine has to encompass and embrace the contemporary social issues in which homes and schools are embedded. This is an approach which is sometimes avoided:

Most family texts and courses ignore the school, and most education courses ignore the family. We must actively integrate the sociologies of education and the family to understand schools and families as institutions and to understand the roles and relationships of the individuals that share responsibility for children (Epstein, 1990, p. 118).

Assumptions of homogeneity tend to position both parents and teachers as uniform groups. This has inevitably contributed to the many strategies for parental involvement which resemble 'how-to' manuals and reflect a 'one size fits all' perspective (Vincent, 1997, pp.271-272). Young suggests that:

...instead of a fictional contract, we require real participatory structures in which actual people, with their geographical, ethnic, gender and occupational differences, assert their perspectives on social issues within institutions which encourage the representation of their distinct voices (Young, 1990, p. 116).

Underlying these words is the Foucaudian project of ethical work which suggests that the quest should be to challenge:

The evidence and the postulates, of shaking up habits, ways of acting and thinking, of dispelling commonplace beliefs, of taking a new measure of rules and institutions (Foucault, 1991a, pp.11-12).

We, as researchers, should be prepared to acknowledge our unwillingness, or reluctance at times, to illuminate the foundations upon which our research knowledge is produced. The designing of inclusive participatory frameworks, in whatever context, involves 'the political, social and philosophical' (Allan, 1999,

p.115). It is both a methodological and ethical project with implications for all involved:

The implication of everyone in ethical work – pupils with special needs, mainstream pupils, teachers, schools and researchers – articulates their complicity in exclusion and their responsibility for inclusion (Allan, 1999, p.113).

It is a project which demands our scrutiny of complicity in the ways in which closure of thinking occurs, truths are manufactured and knowledge produced (Allan, 1999).⁵

There is no dominant orthodoxy which sets the rules of research other than ethical and moral considerations which demand that the vulnerability of those being interviewed be the prime consideration. Hodkinson (2001) argues that the tenet that 'method can ensure objectivity in research, and that we need better, more objective 'safe' research to help inform policy and practice' (Hodkinson, 2001, p.1) demonstrates a misunderstanding of how the research community works. Drawing on the situated cognition literature, Hodkinson argues that educational research is a field made up of overlapping communities of practice, which has largely unwritten rules, and functions as a source of context and unequal access to power and influence. Writing specifically in relation to educational research he notes that the current 'prime determinants' of research quality are based on certain assumptions including the ways in which researchers open up their methods to public scrutiny. Small qualitative case studies (such as this), which are not easily replicable or generalisable, would not be advocated since the current orthodoxy dictates that 'good research should maximise objectivity and

⁵ One example of this is to be found in one of relatively few papers on the role of parents in special education which claims to focus 'upon the concept of partnership' (Fylling and Sandvin, 1999, p.144). The researchers evade the very essence of relationships and partnerships by opting for a methodology which, although doubtless quicker and easier to execute than my own approach, limits their very engagement with the concept of partnership. In all, 26 teachers and coordinators, and 14 parents were interviewed. The researchers write that '*For ethical reasons the interviews are not 'paired cases'; we did not ask teachers about their relations to specific parents, and the teachers did not know which parents we talked to*' (Fylling and Sandvin, 1999, my italics). No rationale is offered as to why 'paired cases' might be considered 'unethical'. Perhaps not altogether unsurprisingly, the researchers find 'that when parents talk about their relationship to school, it is often difficult to know whether it is the teacher, the local school or the school system at large they are talking about' (p.151). Nevertheless, the researchers are able to conclude that there is an 'unequal balance of power between parents and teachers [...] a principal-agent relationship, a perversion of the idea of 'partnership'".

minimise researcher subjectivity, values and emotions' discovering 'neutral findings/facts which can be safely used to improve policy and practice' (Hodkinson, 2001, p.2). This is clearly a controversial approach, not least because it includes an assumption that new research builds upon established findings however rigorously or otherwise arrived at, which in turn raises question as to whose interests might be being served.

Social theories of learning recognise that what is known and what is learned is located in historical, social and cultural contexts and that learning and knowledge formation develop alongside the changes in culture and society (Hodkinson, 2001). Those who view research through a scientific lens might anticipate a linear and progressive 'thinking' resulting in 'more refined bodies of safe knowledge'. From an alternative perspective, research practices change as researchers try different approaches, perhaps resulting, as Hodkinson notes, from the interactions between the 'broad research tradition, the personal life histories, identities and beliefs of researchers, and communities of practice to which researchers belong' (Hodkinson, 2001, p.7). Hodkinson appeals for an acknowledgement of the personal and emotional investment made in research approaches and ideas:

The rational and emotional are part of each other, and never completely separable. Both are located in our sometimes deeply held and often tacit beliefs about the world, education, research and writing (Hodkinson, 2001, p.9).

This, for me, brings another methodological consideration into focus. Undoubtedly, my long association of working with children in a highly personalised and confidential environment has influenced my judgement so that, given the focus of the study, I would have considered it unethical to interview the children directly. My work, whether as an independent specialist teacher, counsellor, advocate or researcher is an on-going apprenticeship involving participation in various communities. Other researchers with divergent identities, interests and value positions will doubtless see the issues differently. Hodkinson writes that judgements about research stem from, and cannot be separated from, the emotional, social and cultural self. The end product, however arrived at, will always be a constructed story whose value lies in the degree to which the interpretations are found to be 'interesting, enlightening, valuable, useful or not'

(Hodkinson, 2001, p.12). If research is to aid the work of policy makers and practitioners, new ways need to be found to bring together the worlds of research, policy and practice:

It means seeing research and learning as closely related parts of knowledge formation, rather than the former as knowledge and discovery and the latter as knowledge transmission. We need to enhance our often diverse research practices, including strong disagreement and argument, and our understanding of the deeply problematic nature of research. We also need to work to give others access to these things (Hodkinson, 2001, p.13).

In other words, a 'community of practice' which incorporates diverse expertise, research, policy and practice has within it the potential to produce something meaningful and relevant. Its participants are co-constructors of both knowledge and a common language with which to communicate with a diverse group of stakeholders. In my analysis I employ explanatory language in preference to the more positivistic approach of quantitative research. Mine is a study drawn from a specific population, relating to one small area under investigation, which lacks the explanatory power of a more general theory. However, as Strauss and Corbin note 'the real merit of a substantive theory lies in its ability to speak specifically for the populations from which it was derived and to apply back to them' (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p.267).

Part of my project is to enable an analysis which aids the unravelling of the 'who is assigning significance to what question' (Radnor, 1994, p.7) in the context of parent-teacher relationships. The challenge facing me is to find a methodology which reflects the complexity of relationships embedded within the twin sites of home and school. I need to employ a methodology which enables the documentation of the personal, experiential and textual meanings attributed to individual practice, whilst exploring the usually 'hidden or veiled' characteristics of teacher knowledge (Husu, 2002). The methodology has to reflect and value equally the voices of all participants and be able to describe and link processes, changes and developments in relationships. This kind of exploratory research demands the use of qualitative research procedures to explore people's constructions of meanings which have not previously been explored (Hassard, 1990).

4.3 Justifying the qualitative paradigm

“Qualitative” and “quantitative” are descriptive terms which do not necessarily describe the research to which they are often attached but are instead characteristics of data. The different world views, values and beliefs which influence data collection are rooted in epistemological and ontological debates concerning the nature of knowledge of the world, and how it can be represented. Thus for example, “verstehen” (interpretive understanding), describes one approach to accessing social action which relies upon the researcher having sufficient empathy and sympathy to be able to reposition him/herself as the respondent. Many would argue that this is impossible, and a more fruitful approach may lie in attempting to uncover the generative processes which produce the perceptions which underpin social actions and behaviours. Radical constructionists might argue that reality is what we make it, social constructionists see truth as consensual, arguing that shared definitions, across the political, cultural or social membership of groups of which we are members, dictate social actions. At the other end of the continuum, realists, who tend towards quantitative work, assume there are objective, measurable truths in the material world. A researcher who has a positivist or essentially empiricist worldview might seek to gather data in line with a search for universals which can be measured and codified numerically. Another researcher with a different theoretical orientation or founding assumption, might collect data which illuminates individual lived experiences, the meanings attributed to events and actions, and subjective definitions. Both researchers however, irrespective of their personal preferences or the strengths and weaknesses of their approaches, would be involved in the similar project of gathering data for analysis.

The text book approach - opting for one method rather than another - is usually justified by saying that “research questions dictate method”. This is invariably simplified and expressed in terms of the “how” and “why” questions indicating a qualitative approach, and “what” and “how much” questions indicating a quantitative approach. Both methods have their uses in theory development, however a quantitative approach to theory building does not privilege the meanings and interpretations of participants’ actions in the same way as a qualitative approach. Qualitative data tends to involve smaller data sets which

are enhanced rather than reduced, in order to produce complex descriptions and understandings of meanings. This inductive process, which may or may not involve hypothesis generation, moves from the descriptive to a higher level of abstracted interpretation. Qualitative research is conducted across all areas of the social sciences and applied fields where researchers are primarily concerned with the behaviours of people in the social world. The study of such behaviours, and the data collected, usually include references to the perceptions and beliefs which form the basis for actions and agency. In other words, a qualitative approach argues for socially organised perceptions and beliefs, rather than what ultimately may be the “truth”, to be understood as the basis for social action:

Where appropriate, qualitative work is disciplined by the socially organised nature of perception. We cannot just arrange the world any way we please but are constrained by our membership in various kinds of groups to perceive it in ways that other members will regard as sensible. It is, then, argued that there is an order and regularity to be found, particularly by concentrating on the typical, the everyday and the routine in a social setting and by aiming to connect the social scientist's analysis to the way that the people involved understand it themselves (Murphy et al., 1998, p.2).

The data, analysis, interpretation and accounts which result from this kind of inquiry tend not to be easily reducible to numbers. At its most simple therefore, qualitative research can be described as ‘any type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification’ (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p.10).

My decision to use qualitative research methods guided all aspects of the research and enabled me to collect data across a range of ideas, practices, philosophies, definitions and descriptive understandings. Research reports are always conditioned by the circumstances of their production and subject to debate as to practices and methods. Some might argue that my findings would be constrained because they rely entirely upon participants' accounts. I would argue that this is but one example of numerous factors which serve as constraints which impact upon research findings and which cannot be completely accounted for or “partialled out” in any analysis. One prime example of this is the relationship between researcher and respondent which can never be neutral, weighted as it by our ‘interpretive baggage’, those ‘multiple intentions and

desires, some of which are consciously known and some of which are not. The same is true of the interviewee' (Scheurich, 1997, p.62). The best, and perhaps only, recourse is to acknowledge and account for these factors transparently as I aim to do here.

At the heart of a qualitative methodology lies the accessing of data from sources such as interviews and the procedures used to interpret and organise the data. The process of analysis, 'the interplay between researchers and data' is both a science and an art (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p.13), leading to the formulating of ideas into a 'logical, systematic and explanatory scheme' (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 21) which either builds, or extends and broadens, theory. Such an approach if conducted rigorously and analysed systematically can explore substantive areas about which little is known. In the context of this research, this approach proffers a source of valuable insight into both educational practices and interactions between those who are jointly involved in working with children experiencing difficulties in school.

4.4 Ethical considerations

Rather than involving the children directly in the research, a process which I consider problematic and which is discussed in detail below, the research has been designed to explore the positions and relationships of those best placed to help the child, that is the parents and teachers who are jointly involved in this mutual endeavour. I felt that decisions as to the ethics involved in relaying the children's words, that is, letting parents represent their children instead of allowing the children to speak for themselves, belong in the realm of the personal beliefs of participants. All participants acknowledged the potentially problematic nature of relationships between teachers and parents of children experiencing difficulties, and tended to cite this as their rationale for contributing to a research project which was motivated by the needs of the children. There was a common belief amongst parents and teachers that any project which might increase understanding and transparency in this area would be useful and productive. This motivation should not distract however from the experience of participating in such a project which was clearly an emotionally charged venture for both myself and those I interviewed. My personal rationale for this research is that a better understanding of parent-teachers relationships, viewed from more than

one perspective, has the potential to benefit children whose needs are at the heart of these relationships. It would be erroneous to construe this project as one in which the children are “seen but not heard” or one that treats children as passive subjects within a project which is motivated by their needs. Its design and methodology emerged from a long deliberation at the outset as to the most ethically appropriate way to conduct the research, giving equal weighting to the interests, positioning and feelings of all involved. It has been a collaborative project involving myself as researcher, practitioners and families as partners in the research process.

4.4.1 Employing a participatory approach

My personal stance towards those whom I interviewed echoes the position outlined by Wolfendale, and highlights the need to recognise, particularly given my area of research, that my approach needs to be consistent with ‘partnership with parents’ principles (Wolfendale, 1999, p.164). I consider the parents and teachers as partnering me in an investigative process. This stance guided me throughout the interviewing process, and in particular, in relation to any extended questioning (i.e. those spontaneous questions and probes which arise within conversations) allowing me to exercise sensitivity and awareness in respect of the information that participants were happy to provide, and those areas of their lives which they chose not to disclose. Although this stance may or may not represent a limitation to the data, it is an acknowledgement that participants are not considered as “objects” of my research. I place a value on their status within my research and was constantly vigilant as to the affects my questioning might have upon them. I therefore adopted what Wolfendale calls ‘the co-operative research model’ and offered participants every opportunity to question freely the interview process and the purpose of the research. This stance is an example of the delicate balance to be struck between maintaining research integrity whilst keeping in view the principles of equality and reciprocal trust inherent within the partnership model.

The verbatim transcriptions themselves, which were returned to participants allowing them the opportunity to make alterations or further comments, were recognised by me as ‘artificial constructions from an oral to a model mode of

communication (Kvale, 1996, p.163). I understood the transcripts, and subsequently the computer program which I used to facilitate the analysis, simply as useful tools for a given purpose. A computer program can no more analyse data than typed transcripts can be understood as anything other than texts 'frozen in time and abstracted from their base in a social interaction' (Kvale, 1996, 167) destined to surface as excerpts of condensed and decontextualised conversations. This is a problematic which has to be addressed. My commitment to a 'co-operative research model' however led me away from a facile understanding of the transcripts as decontextualised dialogue, 'the rock-bottom data of interview research' (Kvale, 1996, p.163). I constantly vacillated between the audio-tapes, my memos, field notes and the typed transcripts as I sought to capture and represent to the best of my ability the stories that were shared with me in a form which would unify the spirit of the original interview situation, the analysis and the final report.

4.4.2 Choosing a dyadic approach

I chose a dyadic approach for the Main Study simply because any other construction seemed to me to be less appropriate or adequate. This is because the dyadic approach treats equally the perceptions, expectations and priorities of stakeholders and demands that the data be analysed and interpreted from two viewpoints, offering two lenses through which to view interactions and relationships. Although this is a small-scale local study, its dyadic approach offers insight above and beyond the anecdotal or purely subjective indicators of effectiveness which characterise some research in the field. The result is an analysis of the ways in which parents and teachers view an individual child's "learning difficulties" or "special educational needs" and if and how this might affect their relationship and management of educational difficulties. The approach brings to the fore the processes and procedures employed in the exchange of information, the perceived value of different kinds of knowledge and how this knowledge might affect relationships and choices of action.

4.4.3 Positioning the children within the research

Although the research delves deeply into some under-theorised areas, the dynamic role played by children as mediators between home and school, which

constantly lurks within the transcripts, is left largely unexplored because of the ethical issues which I now address. The children are both the subjects and objects of their parents' and teachers' concern. It is their perceived needs which generate the parent–teacher interactions explored in this thesis.

It is within the field of childhood studies that I locate and justify my choice of methodology in relation to the children who mediate the interviews. There is a growing literature on pupil voice which explores childhood and schooling from the perspective of children (see, for example, Devine, 2004), generating alternative discourses and debates which question the degree to which school experiences are either democratic or inclusive. Such commentators usefully draw our attention both to the adults who invariably control children's experiences within schools and to educational research projects which reflect adult priorities. The pupils meanwhile, who ultimately are the true consumers of education, generally have the least opportunity to contribute their views and are positioned as less than full participants in their own schooling. Children are learners who have mapped out a large part of their basic lifelong knowledge and skills before they commence their formal education (Gardner, 1993). Yet "childhood" is a construct or set of ideas revolving around relatively unchanging views as to how children should behave and relate to adults (Alderson, 2003, p.7). From this perspective, adulthood implies, perhaps even endorses, wisdom and strength whilst childhood suggests ignorance: 'In general, adults have the power to initiate, assert, maintain and change the rules, whilst children must comply, adapt, mediate or resist' (Pollard and Triggs, 2000, p.301). Although authoritative decisions are based on assumptions and standards which claim to be neutral and impartial, such decisions often serve to 'silence, ignore and render deviant the abilities, needs and norms of others' (Young, 1990, p.116). Pupils who imbibe the authority of teachers and tend towards acquiescence and obedience rather than negotiation or resistance bring to the fore tensions between structure and agency. Researchers, teachers, policy makers and those involved in school management amongst others, have tended to ignore the insider experience and expertise of pupils. The exercising of power, the agency of pupils and the recognition of them as participating citizens rather than obedient and docile subjects have tended to be side-stepped issues. In this way, some adult-centered social science

research projects have tended to ignore or misrepresent children and their interests, perhaps because taking children seriously can involve tackling many invested interests and economies (Alderson, 2003, p.15).

Explaining or justifying why children are so often excluded from research in which they themselves are the subjects or objects is sometimes difficult. Such a stance may be justified when the research delves into sensitive areas which could have potentially negative consequences for the children had they been interviewed. It is important therefore, in respect of this thesis, to be clear as to the status of the children and how consideration of their interests has influenced the design of the research resulting in a methodology which is uncommon in educational research. The children (and their families) represented in the sample are typical of those with whom I have worked for 20 years in my professional role as an independent educational consultant. Working with children with a wide range of problems or difficulties which generate concern among parents and teachers, has furnished me with an acute awareness of the vulnerability of the children, their families, and occasionally, the vulnerability of their teachers. In that sense, an ethnographical element has influenced my choice of methodology.

Generally the law considers persons under the age of 18 as children who have not attained the legal age for consent. The ages of the children discussed in the Main Study range between 7 and 12. I therefore requested and gained permission for the children to be discussed from their parents or guardians. I also gained their permission for me to contact their child's teachers. All individuals, regardless of age or status, share the same right to be fully informed about the research in which they participate. However, not all children will be emotionally or cognitively mature enough to be able to give "informed" consent. This research explores relationships between specific adults, individual parents and teachers, who hold a high degree of significance in the daily lives of children. Vulnerable children, such as those in this study, may readily comply with requests from adults but with limited, if indeed any, understanding of the way in which they are being positioned as both the subjects and objects of inquiry. Obtaining informed consent is in itself a problematic practice, but it becomes

even more so when the simple failure by a child to raise objections can be incorrectly construed as assent.

From the outset I gave high priority to consideration to any potentially problematic or harmful areas which might have negative consequences for the children. I was concerned about the unintentional but virtually unavoidable consequence of increasing a child's worries by raising awareness that he or she might be giving cause for concern. The degree to which children are aware of having difficulties within school is partly determined by age and partly by the nature of the problems. Children who require ongoing medication/medical supervision, or those receiving a range of therapies, tend to be generally more aware of their difficulties than other children whose special needs may be more transitory. Even the nuance of a suggestion of "failing" can be disempowering, negatively affecting a child's self-esteem, sense of identity and ability to participate and learn. My second concern related to the conflict of loyalty arising for children were they to find themselves in situations where they would be discussing both their parents and teachers with a limited, if any, understanding of the participatory inquiry which grounds this research⁶. The third problematic area concerns the interviewing of children diagnosed with an autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) or those having receptive or expressive language difficulties for whom the interview procedure may be an inappropriate means or method of communication.

With the above considerations in mind and in order to minimise the risk to the children of any harm or discomfort which might arise from their direct involvement in the research, the methodology employs a dyadic approach which

⁶ This point was brought home to me when I interviewed a parent of a youngster with a rare and serious brain disorder. In this instance the school chose not to be involved in the research so the parent's interview is not included in this research. The parent arrived for the interview accompanied by the elder sibling of the child in question. She was eager for me to be aware how the school's approach to her younger son also impacted upon her other son. At various points in the interview she called upon her son for confirmation of her account. It was apparent that this boy's split loyalties and sense of protection towards his younger brother made him feel uncomfortable in the interview situation. Children interviewed in the presence of their parents, or their teachers, may well give an alternative account of a situation which would be difficult, if not impossible, to account for with any objectivity in the subsequent data analysis. Ultimately, the decision as to how children are interviewed, that is in the presence or otherwise of other adults, should lie with the parents and not the researcher. Issues of loyalty and partiality were also raised by the adults who participated in this research, some of whom voiced their fears of possible repercussions and sanctions if they spoke freely.

avoids the interviewing of children. This research however is not just another example of children being seen and not heard. Although in my research it is the direct perspectives of parents and teachers, (and not the children) which provide the empirical base for the analysis of interactions and relationships, the presence of the children is constant through the refracted views of their parents and teachers. A space is thus created in which understandings and clashes of perspectives reflect very different approaches to the issue of the child as the subject of parent-teacher interactions. I have drawn upon more than one theoretical approach to aid and enable my analysis in order to construct contexts in which parents' and teachers' different perspectives on a range of issues might occur. These issues include understandings of partnership, role, position, experience, motivation, institutions such as schools, as well as parents' and teachers' explanations and understanding of the children, each other, and the situation(s) each find themselves in. The negotiation, or otherwise, of meaning as represented through dialogues, constitutes a field in which each person's understanding is explored. The subsequent analysis and discussion proffers one version of how the child, as the mutual focus of the interaction, is conceptualised and understood.

4.5 The research design

The research design consists of two inter-connected studies. The first, a preliminary study, engages uniquely with the perspectives of parents. The second, the Main Study, is a dyadic study of parents and teachers. The parental sample for both studies is drawn from parents whose ongoing concerns about their child's educational progress led them to seek additional information/help/advice from sources external to the school. Examples of external sources of information or support include:

1. Private assessments of any description.
2. Contact with a voluntary association or support group.
3. Private specialist tuition.
4. Any other source of information or support, for example, doctors, family members, other parents, libraries, or the Internet.

4.5.1 The preliminary study

The preliminary study is a small-scale study involving 10 parents of children who are currently experiencing, or have previously experienced, difficulties in school. The data gathered from the preliminary study illuminates the personal accounts, perceptions and insights of parents who have unresolved concerns about their child's education. The data provides for an exploration of the ways in which individual parents experience relationships with teachers within a potentially problematic discourse, namely the understanding and provision for children experiencing difficulties. The study, designed as a first level of inquiry, provides a framework for the Main Study which aims to investigate and illuminate the personal accounts, experiences and actions of parents and teachers jointly involved in the education of children giving cause for concern. The broad objectives of the preliminary study are:

1. To explore the dimensions of parental concerns.
2. To explore parental agency.
3. To explore and illuminate parental interpretations of official pedagogical practices.
4. To evaluate the effectiveness of the parents' interview schedule in relation to the research questions.
5. To provide a basis for the design of the Main Study.

Prior to interviewing the parents, I contacted each of them individually to discuss the research and to answer their questions, many of which revolved around issues of confidentiality. All of the parents, without exception, were eager to participate in a research project which was a) motivated by the needs of the children and b) might produce a more transparent understanding of parent-teacher relationships. Each parent was given a brief written outline of the context and aims of the research and asked to complete a short questionnaire (Appendix 3) prior to the interview taking place. One of the questions in the questionnaire asked parents to list professionals with whom they had had contact in relation to their concerns. The following table shows their answers:

Table 1. Parental contact with professionals

Contact	M1	M1	M2	F3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8	M9	M9	M10
Class teacher	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Support teacher					X						X	
Classroom assistant					X							
Head teacher	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X	X	X
Borough Co-ordinator, SEN					X					X	X	
Education Psychologist			X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X
SENCo	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Occupational Therapist										X	X	
Special Needs governor					X		X				X	
Home tuition service											X	
Language Advisor			X				X					

The table shows that in every case, concerned parents contact the class teacher, and often the Head teacher and SENCo. This reinforces my assumption that teachers play a key role in influencing parental agency and supports my rationale for the interviewing of class teachers in the Main Study.

Before I began recording the interviews, participants were given a further opportunity to ask questions and to clarify any outstanding issues or worries in respect of the research. The final question I asked gave the participants the opportunity to comment on their experience of the interview process. I was glad that these comments were all positive, even though many participants had clearly found that the revisiting of distressing memories was not a pain free experience. The semi-structured interviews, which lasted on average for 60 minutes, were conducted in my office which was familiar territory for all the parents. Audio tape recording was used for the interviews and copies of the transcriptions were returned to participants providing the opportunity for

amendments, or further comments. Only when I believed that informed consent had been given were the transcripts incorporated as data in this research.

The accounts given in the preliminary study are given by parents alone. As such they express parental understandings and interpretations which clearly cannot be taken as accurate accounts of what teachers actually do, feel or believe. The study draws uniquely upon a small group of parents with whom I had worked over a period of time either as an independent teacher to their child, befriender or educational advisor. My professional involvement with the families in the preliminary study means that I conducted the interviews already having a great deal of background information about the individual parents and children with whom I had already established relationships, and about whom I had inevitably formed opinions. In order to gain a broad overview of parental experiences and perceptions, no restrictions were placed upon the age of the child, the nature of the child's difficulties, the type or location of the school, or the nature or extent of my involvement.

4.5.2 The Parents

Table 2 collates information relating to occupation as given by parents or guardians. "M" denotes a mother and "F", a father. "N.K. indicates "not known". The children's names are fictitious and the "Code" protects the anonymity of participants.

Table 2. Parental occupations (Preliminary study)

Code	Child's name	Mother's occupation	Father's occupation
M1	Paul	School health sister	Bank official
M1	Dominic	School health sister	Bank official
M2	Mary	Business development manager, IT	Sales Executive
F3	Ian	Estate agent	Sports journalist
M4	Peter	Teaching assistant	Technical manager
M5	Nick	Business administrator, self-employed	Production manager
M6	Colin	Classroom assistant	N.K.
M7	Anna	Ambulance controller	Accountant
M8	Jason	Portage home visitor	Salesman
M9	Chris	Nurse	N.K.
M9	David	Nurse	N.K.
M10	Henry	Teacher	Electrical contractor

This information is incorporated in Table 4 together with the information regarding occupation given by the parents in the Main Study. A discussion of the overall findings is given in section 4.6.2.

4.5.3 The Children

10 parents participated in the preliminary study. The gender imbalance of ten boys to two girls reflects the higher proportion of boys than girls who generate “cause for concern”. The focus of the research upon parent-teacher relationships means that the “voices” of the children are heard and relayed only through the third party accounts of their parents and their teachers. The rationale for this is explained in section 4.4.3 above. Nevertheless, the children are real children and are introduced here with brief cameos:

Colin, aged 12, attended a special school for children with moderate learning difficulties. His mother had persevered for a long time to gain this provision which proved so beneficial that consideration was being given to the possibility of reintegrating Colin into mainstream school on a part-time basis.

Peter, 15, was in a mainstream secondary school, and like Colin, had a Statement of Special Educational Needs. Peter's learning difficulties appeared to have resulted from a serious illness when he was 6 years old.

Both David, aged 14 and his 12 year old brother Chris were dyslexic and dyspraxic. David's illegible handwriting and poor spelling skills had masked his intelligence at primary school. Once he received the appropriate help he soared ahead academically and was currently in the top set for every subject at secondary school. Chris held a Statement (without resources) to cover the transfer to secondary school which was considered to be potentially problematic.

Paul, aged 17, and his brother Dominic, aged 14, both had literacy difficulties. Paul had just left school and was currently attending a college with the hope of eventually going to university.

Nick aged 15 also hoped to overcome his literacy difficulties and go to university.

Jason, aged 12, had severe reading and spelling difficulties which affected his self-esteem.

Anna, aged 15, who attended a private school, had difficulty processing language.

Ian, aged 13, had difficulty concentrating and remaining on task, which led to the private primary school he attended, asking him "to leave". Following a successful admissions appeal by his parents, he subsequently attended the local mainstream primary school.

Henry, aged 13, had a history of being excluded, first from nursery school, and then from a private primary school. He was excluded for a third time in his second year of mainstream secondary education and after a lengthy period of

home tuition attended another secondary school in a different borough, where his behaviour was currently giving cause for concern.

7 year old Mary was becoming increasingly emotionally upset as her difficulty grasping the basics of literacy became increasingly evident.

All of the children, except Mary, were listed on their school's SEN Register (Department for Education, 1994).

4.6 The Main Study

The Main Study is a small-scale interview-based study of 10 pairs of parents and mainstream primary school teachers in one London borough.⁷ Each dyad consists of one interview with a parent and class teacher both of whom are involved in negotiating "a way forward" influenced by their personal understandings of the needs of the child. The parental sample, as in the preliminary study, is drawn from parents whose ongoing concerns about their child's educational progress have led them to seek additional information/help/advice from sources external to the school.

The study consists of separate interviews with parents and teachers who speak both about individual children and each other. Neither was aware of the contents of the others' interview. In common with the preliminary study the focus is upon the communication of information between the parent and teacher, an act which is understood as an act of parental agency. This is not intended to demote the informal verbal communications which take place between many parents and teachers but to provide a specific focus for discussion.

The Main Study explores and illuminates the contexts within which teachers make decisions in relation to children with special educational needs, including sources and kinds of information which influence and shapes their perceptions and practices. My broad aim was to gather data which illuminates the different knowledges and understandings that both parents and teachers have about individual children, their conceptualisations of discourses and official pedagogical

⁷ The location is unidentified in order to protect the anonymity of participants.

practices in school, and the possible affect of these upon the dynamics of parent-teacher relationships.

4.6.1 Finding participants

In order to gain access to possible participants for the Main Study I approached some of the sources of information and support identified by the parents in the preliminary study. I explained my intentions and requested their assistance in identifying potential participants. Parents were asked by these contacts if their names and contact details could be given to a researcher. I was then able to speak directly to the parents and to decide whether they fitted the criteria to be participants in the research. This in turn generated a snowballing process whereby parents suggested names of further potential participants. In all cases issues of confidentiality were discussed in depth. I also contacted professional colleagues and personal contacts in my search for potential participants. The interviews, conducted at a location of the participant's choice, were only undertaken after I had personally contacted the parents, explained the dyadic nature of the research and received their specific permission to contact the child's teacher.

It took time to find the Main Study participants, who were all unknown to me, because of my reliance upon others to furnish me with the names of potential participants. Response times to my requests for interviews from teachers were very variable, from one teacher arranging to be interviewed the following day, to another who I contacted 6 times over a three month period before the interview took place. Where explanations for this were given to me they were noted in my fieldnotes and included as data. The process was a lengthy one which resulted in some interviews eventually not being included either because the teacher reversed his/her decision to participate or because the nature of the child's difficulty could have led to his/her identification. The dyads which constitute the main body of the empirical work of this thesis are the first ten to be completed.

4.6.2 The Parents

Table 3 collates the information regarding occupation given by the Main Study parents in the questionnaires. Each child has a fictitious name and is linked to its

parent/teacher dyad by a code – P1/T1 to P10/T10 – to protect anonymity and to facilitate cross-referencing across the text. “N.K.” indicates “not known”.

Table 3. Parental occupations (Main Study)

Code	Child's name	Mother's occupation	Father's occupation
P1/T1	Johnny	Learning Support assistant	Electrical fitter
P2/T2	Adam	Teacher in school for children with complex learning difficulties	N.K
P3/T3	Billy	N.K.	N.K.
P4/T4	Judy	Part-time Retail Sales	Project Manager
P5/T5	Peter	Teaching assistant	Technical manager
P6/T6	Alex	Learning support assistant	Account director
P7/T7	Chloe, Alan, Diane	Student nurse, Residential social worker, (respite care)	Technical Engineer
P8/T8	Julia	Artist/housewife	Accountant
P9/T9	Conor	Journalist/Press Officer	Journalist/T.V. Producer
P10/T10	Michael, Melanie	Sales person, now housewife	Surveyor/ Estates Manager

One parent did not complete the questionnaire and not all fathers' occupations were given. It should be noted that the broad job titles provided by parents may hide ambiguities. Nevertheless, in Table 4, I have approximated the social class groupings across the cohort using the Standard Occupational Classification 2000 (SOC2000) which consists of the following 9 major groups:

Managers and Senior Officials

Professional Occupations

Associate Professional and Technical Occupations

Administrative and Secretarial Occupations

Skilled Trades Occupations

Personal Service Occupations

Sales and Customer Service Occupations

Process, Plant and Machine Operatives
Elementary Occupations

**Table 4. Parental occupation (both studies)
according to SOC2000 groupings**

Group	Mother's Occupation	Father's Occupation
1		4
2	4	4
3	6	3
4	1	1
5		2
6	5	
7	2	1
8		
9		

From the information given on the questionnaires, approximately 63% of parents fall in the first 3 SOC2000 groupings, and approximately 37% fall in the next 4 groupings. My sample is therefore drawn in the main from the professional middle class but includes a minority from the intermediate and working class groups. No parents however are in the lowest two categories.⁸ I am assuming that these social groupings, although effectively “best guesses”, have consequences for the stocks of “appropriate” capital to which Bourdieu refers (see section 3.2.1.). The small-scale nature of the study means that limitations within the data may mask the possible effects of the parents' social class background on their responses and actions. The limitations of the research are elaborated upon in section 9.6.

4.6.3 Introducing the children

This section introduces the children who are both the subjects and objects of the dyadic interviews. Descriptors drawn from interviews with their mothers and

⁸ No systematic data on housing or parents' education is available, thus the information on parental occupation offers a useful but incomplete indicator of class.

teachers are reproduced side by side to present a composite picture of what each understands by “areas of concern”. It is important to emphasise this point because my analysis is based upon transcripts which are snapshots capturing periods of concern which have generated specific parent-teacher interactions. The descriptors are presented in tabular form to emphasise that both parents and teachers share common grounds for concern, although their interpretations of diagnosis or cause may vary. This would not have emerged without employing a dyadic approach to the data collection. This initial common ground, which is the potential site for negotiation of meaning and practice, is crucial to the development of this thesis. The dyads offer insight into different perspectives and approaches which come into play, and an initial reading of parents and teachers understanding of, and responses to, both the children’s difficulties and each other.

Due to space restrictions only the descriptors for Billy are given here however descriptors for all the children appear in full in Appendix 2.

Billy

Mother (P3)	Teacher (T3)
<i>Billy's Year 6 teacher didn't like him...she looked on him as if he was just a naughty, disobedient, unruly child. I viewed his difficulties as yes, he was occasionally naughty and undisciplined, but...eighty per-cent of the time it was not his fault. It was the dysfunction that he has.</i>	<i>At the start of Year 4 he was a very mixed up little boy, very angry, took it out on everyone. Into Year 6, he's hardened and become very spiteful, and nasty.</i>
<i>You can either communicate with Billy, or you can't communicate with Billy and if it's a day or if it's an hour, or if it's a few moments when he's in his non-communicating mode, you haven't got a hope in Hell of getting anywhere.</i>	<i>He wants to learn sometimes, but if he doesn't there's nothing you're gonna do to convince him, that he needs to know this.</i>
<i>Billy learnt how to abuse a women and that's what he did. He's seen his father hit me and Billy even hits me [...] Billy behaves exactly like his father a spoilt, nasty, horrible little brat that if he doesn't get his own way, will just create merry Hell. And that's how his father behaves. Billy's seen too</i>	<i>It's outside the classroom really and his language and his attitude towards other people. [...] It's all based on...the reaction he gets at home, and the fact that his parents let him play them off against each other, they have no contact between themselves, Billy gets what he wants. So, he expects it at</i>

<p><i>much, far too much. But I can't change that.</i></p> <p><i>[...]We've never behaved like a normal family, whatever a normal family is [...]</i></p> <p><i>There was always arguments, there was always conflict, there was always, an atmosphere. As much as I tried to still carry on with a normal...sort of, day to day life, it was always very difficult and I was always very strained and stressed.</i></p>	<p><i>school, if he treats us the way he treats his Mum, particularly, which has come from his Dad, then he'll get what he wants. [...] It's his character traits, but you can see where they've come from, unfortunately. He's a product of both of his parents.</i></p>
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4.6.4 The teachers

I asked parents for the names of teachers whom I could contact with their consent. The teacher in every case was either the child's current class teacher, or the teacher who had taught the child in the previous 12-24 months. I contacted the teachers and explained the focus of the research. Some teachers responded immediately, others felt they needed to contact their head teachers. Teachers who expressed an interest were sent a brief written outline of the context and aims of the research and asked to complete a short questionnaire (Appendix 4) prior to the interview taking place. The interviews, conducted at a location of the teacher's choice, were held either in their schools, my office, or at their homes. The final question I asked gave the teachers an opportunity to comment on their experience of the interview process. All the responses were positive with several teachers expressing relief, having feared they might be asked questions they would be unable to answer. Interestingly, some teachers found the experience cathartic, an opportunity to "voice the unsayable". My own relief as each dyad was completed and "in the bag" so to speak must have been palpable as I gave each teacher a small box of chocolate 'Matchmakers' by way of thanks.

Table 5 gives the questionnaire answers relating to teachers' length of service specialist SEN training.

Table 5. Teachers' experience and specialist SEN training

Code	Child's name	Teacher: Years of Experience	Teacher: SEN training
P1/T1	Johnny	6	Autism behaviour management, Behaviour intervention
P2/T2	Adam	3	None
P3/T3	Billy	8	None
P4/T4	Judy	26	None
P5/T5	Peter	25	RSA Diploma (SPELD) Diploma Speech and Language
P6/T6	Alex	18 months	None
P7/T7	Chloe, Alan, Diane	3	Studying for Diploma in education of H.I. pupils
P8/T8	Julia	4	Conversion course certificate
P9/T9	Conor	6	Inset courses, Borough courses
P10/T10	Michael, Melanie	7	Teaching practice in Special Education school

Abbreviations

S.P.E.L.D. = Specific Learning Difficulties (Dyslexia).

S.E.N. = Special Educational Needs.

H.I. = Hearing impaired.

R.S.A. = Royal Society of Arts.

The table demonstrates the wide variations in the experience of the teachers interviewed which ranged from one to twenty-six years. Of the 10 teachers interviewed, nearly half cited no specialist training in SEN whilst another 3 appear to rely upon "INSET-type courses" for their professional development.

Only 3 teachers, one of whom is a SENCo, cite specific studies in particular areas of special educational needs, namely dyslexia, autism and the hearing impaired.

Having explained the rationale behind the first two important methodological decisions to impact upon the research design, I turn now to a third significant decision, namely the adoption of Wenger's 'community of practice' as an ideal type.

4.7 The 'community of practice' theory and its application as an 'Ideal Type'
In order to develop an account of a variety of forms of parent-teacher interactions, I have incorporated Wenger's theory of a 'community of practice' into my "conceptual tool-kit". There are inevitably difficulties which arise when a theory is imported from one context to another. However, in this instance, it is these very difficulties which generate opportunities for the breaking of new ground and the making of an original contribution to the field of knowledge through the use of both inductive and deductive modes of qualitative enquiry.

I opted to employ Wenger's 'community of practice' as an ideal type, or template, for my analysis. A template, in its physical form, is a tool or artifact created for the specific function of helping to shape something accurately, a pattern or model used to reproduce shapes. In the context of understanding the diverse and complex nature of the social world, the ideal type has significant heuristic value. As a template, it is not concerned with reproducing shapes but rather with discerning shapes and forms within the social reality in question. The concept of the ideal type, which originated with Max Weber, functions as a conceptual device which helps to render more manageable the process of analysis of social complexity. Ideal types are abstractions of reality which draw upon core elements of a particular social phenomenon to form a logically consistent whole, or 'ideal type'. In Weber's own words, an ideal type:

... is formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytic construct...In its conceptual purity, this mental construct...cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality (Weber, 1949, p.90).

The ideal type refers to a set of consistent characteristics, which, although never corresponding to concrete reality, function as a construct or model to which descriptions of reality can be compared. For instance, from the starting point that individual meanings and motives drive the ways in which individuals act in society, Weber suggests that four ideal types can encapsulate all the diverse forms of social action. The first ideal type suggests that social action is motivated by emotion; the second, the Traditional, that social action is motivated by habit; the third, the Value-Rational, refers to social action motivated by abstract ideals and the fourth, the Instrumental-Rational, sees social action motivated by a short-term set of intentions such as those which form the basis of capitalist investment. Weber would argue that motivation and intention drive social action and that societies are the product of human intentions and actions. The ideal type that I employ is an analytical ideal type rather than a socio-historical ideal type. It is a model which, because it comprises abstract phenomena each with its logical opposite, can have extended applications to a host of social phenomena. This conceptual tool provides an analytical starting point for understanding the complexities of social life and the similarities and differences between practices and relationships in varying empirical contexts. It is a tool which facilitates the handling of the complex qualitative analysis of parent-teacher relationships.

Wenger writes that:

Communities of practice are an integral part of our daily lives. They are so informal and so pervasive that they rarely come into explicit focus, but for the same reasons they are also quite familiar. Although the term may be new, the experience is not (Wenger, 1998, p.7).

He provides a framework for articulating 'to what degree, in which ways and to which purpose it is (or is not) useful to view a social configuration as a community of practice' (Wenger, 1998, p.122). Described as an analytical tool, Wenger's 'community of practice' constitutes a level of analysis which is neither a 'specific, narrowly defined activity or interaction nor a broadly defined aggregate that is abstractly historical and social' (Wenger, 1998, p.125). A 'community of practice', although not necessarily reified as such in the discourse of its participants, has certain indicators of its formation namely, i) mutual

engagement, ii) a negotiated enterprise, and iii) a repertoire of negotiable resources accumulated over time. These characteristics, realised in the following sub-themes, constitute the starting point for a comparative analysis of parent-teacher relationships:

1. Sustained mutual relationships – harmonious or conflictual
2. Shared ways of engaging in doing things together
3. The rapid flow of information and propagation of innovation
4. Absence of introductory preambles, as if conversations and interactions were merely the continuation of an ongoing process
5. Very quick set-up of a problem to be discussed
6. Substantial overlap in participants' descriptions of who belongs
7. Knowing what others know, what they can do, and how they can contribute to an enterprise
8. Mutually defining identities
9. The ability to assess the appropriateness of actions and products
10. Specific tools, representations and other artifacts
11. Local lore, shared stories, inside jokes, knowing laughter
12. Jargon and shortcuts to communication as well as the ease of producing new ones
13. Certain styles recognized as displaying membership
14. A shared discourse reflecting a certain perspective on the world (Wenger, 1998, pp.125-126).

Although the dominant tone of these characteristics is harmonious rather than conflictive, the possibility, or even likelihood of conflict is accepted as “part and parcel” of the model. In this thesis, the ‘community of practice’ is employed as a heuristic working model to aid the investigation of parent-teacher forms of mutuality and co-operation within the context of situations which are, or may become, problematic or challenging. The data, which can be mapped so as to identify a variety of forms of relationships, provides examples of relationships which conform to a greater or lesser degree in each of the various respects, to an ‘ideal’ model of partnership. This accords with Wenger’s model in that ‘it is

not necessary that participants interact intensely with everyone else', nor 'that everything participants do be accountable to a joint enterprise' nor indeed is it necessary that a repertoire be locally produced' (Wenger, 1998, p.126). Indeed it is not even necessary for all of the characteristics described in the sub-themes above to be present in specific combinations, and it is the modelling of different combinations which serve to extend the analytical development of parent-teacher relationships. What is required, however, is that the three dimensions of a 'community of practice' are present to a substantial degree over a period of time.

Opting to employ Wenger's 'community of practice' as a template for my analysis enabled me to analyse and subsequently model my case studies according to their types or degrees of partnership using the 'community of practice' as an ideal type. In this way I am able to develop and analyse a range of factors which aid our understanding as to how and why some parent-teacher relationships are experienced as effective whilst others are less so⁹.

I now turn away from the methodological decision-making rationales and address the methods I elected to employ in order to operationalise the research, namely the pilot studies, interview procedures and schedules and computer programs which aid analysis.

4.8 The pilot studies

Having discussed my research interests with the local education authority and on receipt of written permission from the Director of Education, I collected data for both studies between December 2000 and August 2002. I began by conducting pilot interviews with both parents and teachers in order to evaluate the effectiveness of my interview schedule and interviewing techniques. This usefully raised my awareness that an interview can be a unique and poignant experience, that certain areas of questioning can be traumatic and reawaken painful memories for participants and that questions can have different degrees of significance and meanings for participants. These realisations helped me to fine-tune both my interviewing techniques and interview schedule, and to become more aware of when, where and which kinds of additional prompts might

⁹ From the viewpoint of participants

be sensitively used. I paid particular attention to the beginning of the interviews which underwent several changes. I sought to find an introduction that would put participants, some of whom felt they might be inhibited by the tape-recorder, at ease and able to talk freely. I finally settled on an opening question which allowed parents to talk freely about their children. In accordance with my commitment to a participatory approach modelled on 'the co-operative research model' (Wolfendale, 1999) all participants were encouraged to ask questions about the process and purpose of the research. All were offered the opportunity to comment upon the typed interview transcripts before they became included as data in the project. In the early stages several transcripts were returned with annotations. These led to my improving the methods I used for recording and transcription.

4.8.1 Piloting the dyadic interviews

The pilot for the Main Study arose spontaneously from my involvement with one family who had participated in the preliminary study. Peter was 15 at the time of the interview, and his parents' account, like other accounts in the preliminary study, spanned progress and events over several years. These preliminary accounts are particularly useful as they provide the opportunity to chart critical moments, events and relationships over time. Initially I had been approached by Peter's parents who sought an independent view of his educational progress. Subsequently, my role was to become that of a 'broker', someone who is able to use their multi-membership to co-ordinate and align perspectives (Wenger, 1998, p.109). Peter's class teacher, a SENCo, had 25 years experience as a teacher, and was a parent herself. Her interest in my area of research led to her offering to pilot the teacher's interview. I had previously piloted the teachers' interview schedule which had resulted in my changing the format of the interview and the wording of the questions. But these original pilot interviews had not been specifically linked to an individual parent's interview within a dyadic study. This therefore was an opportunity not to be missed, although it meant that this particular dyad, methodologically speaking, would straddle both studies and have different dimensions to the other dyads in the Main Study. For this reason, my interview with Peter's mother is included in the preliminary study but not in the Main Study.

Prior to the interview, I had discussed with Peter's mother how well she felt she could recall his years in primary school. She replied that she had found the events 'so traumatic that they were engraved in my memory' (Fieldnotes). This suggests the use of what the cognitive psychologist Tulving refers to as 'episodic memory' which stores events and is concerned 'with unique, concrete, personal experiences dated in the rememberer's past' (Tulving, 1983, p.v). In contrast, recalling events and individual children can be problematic for teachers who work with many children. As is suggested in the extracts below (my emphasis added), this teacher had relied at times upon what Neisser calls 'repisodic memory', a kind of synthesis of repeated events whereby what appears to be an episode actually represents a repetition (Neisser, 1981, p.158), thus:

- *'I **probably** acted quicker because she had spoken to me than I may have done otherwise'.*
- *'So I was aware right from when he came into the Juniors that he had difficulties, because **it's reported, I presume**, from the Infants school and from mum, who **would immediately, may have immediately** come in and spoken to me as Special Needs Co-ordinator'.*
- *'I'm trying to think whether I...I **presume I would have read...probably** tested at various intervals with the Schonell reading test. How often I can't remember now. **I would have tested** at reasonable intervals to make sure things were moving on, **I would have monitored** through my own notes'.*
(T5).

The transcript from Peter's teacher was returned to me adorned with several "Post-it" notes. These highlight the potential problematics of memory recall which led to my changing the parameters of the Main Study. In order to minimise episodes of repisodic memory, I redesigned the Main Study to include only teachers who were either the child's current teacher, or who had taught the child during the previous year. This may seem an obvious point to make, but the various forms and effects of memory recall are not always acknowledged in research which relies upon interviews as the primary means of data collection. The pilot highlights the problem of accepting unquestioningly the veracity of

accounts which rely upon, or reflect, a participant's memories of events which may have been influenced by hindsight.

4.9 The interview as a research tool

Qualitative research draws upon the lived-in world of participants. It explores both their relationships to and within it and the multiplicity of meanings common to social contexts with the objective of exposing new and unexpected phenomena and/or themes which are important from the participants perspective. The subsequent analysis, conducted systematically, can result in increasing our understanding of the human situation through unveiling the contradictions between the general and the specific within the social world. The phenomenological approach facilitates the setting aside of personal preconceptions ("bracketing") and allows the researcher to 'enter the field of perception of participants; seeing how they experience, live and display the phenomenon' (Creswell, 1998). Phenomenology has long been used in the social and human sciences, psychology, nursing and health sciences, and education where researchers have sought to uncover 'the central underlying meaning of the experience [...] where experiences contain both the outward appearance and inward consciousness based on memory, image and meaning' (Creswell, 1998, p.52). Underpinning a phenomenological approach is the ontological assumption that reality is subjective and multiple.

The conversation between researcher and participant, the interview, involves a negotiation of meaning (Kvale, 1996, p.65) and functions as a specific tool with a unique potential within a 'construction site of knowledge' (Kvale, 1996, p.14) where knowledge is produced and tested intersubjectively through conversations (Kvale, 1996, p.297). Kvale describes the research interview as an 'interpersonal situation, a conversation between two partners about a theme of mutual interest' in which knowledge evolves through dialogue (Kvale, 1996, p.125). The researcher alternates between 'narrative-finder' and narrative-creator' (Kvale, 1996, p.201) as he or she engages in a dialogue with the transcripts. The phenomenological approach is the most appropriate for my field of research with the narrative interview a powerful tool for exploring the multiplicity of meanings common to social contexts.

4.9.1 The interview schedule

The semi-structured interview schedule for parents, having been well developed and tested in the preliminary study, provides the structure for both the parents and teachers interviews in the Main Study. The interview schedules for parents (Appendix 4) and teachers (Appendix 6) are designed to complement each other and follow a similar structure to facilitate comparisons across the transcripts. The interview schedules for both groups are designed as guidelines for conducting semi-structured interviews. The schedules are structured to the extent that they define topics to be covered, but allow for a high degree of flexibility and for additional questions or prompts to be inserted when, where and if appropriate. The schedules begin with questions that are informational and child-specific, followed by questions which become more open ended and general.

I broke down my original research questions into 37 sub-questions (see Box 1 below). The interview schedule, designed to elicit data from which I could compile answers to the original research questions, draws upon these sub-questions for its structure. I carefully considered each proposed interview question in relation to the sub-questions to ensure coverage of all aspects of the research questions. Examples of this are given in Box 2. Kvale refers to a similar process whereby interview questions can be evaluated both thematically and dimensionally 'A good interview question should contribute thematically to knowledge production and dynamically to promoting a good interview interaction' (Kvale, 1996, p.129).

The process of linking the research questions to the interview schedule keeps the focus of the data collection and the subsequent data analysis clearly in the forefront. The 37 sub-questions function as a mind map during the interviewing, facilitating the use of subtle prompts where necessary whilst avoiding the need for leading questions. The process is another example of the recursive and reiterative nature of the research process. A structured approach at the outset of the research is particularly necessary for a dyadic study such as this where the analysis will depend upon compatible and complementary, rather than disparate, data sets. As Kvale writes 'The analysis of an interview is interspersed between

the initial story told by the interviewee to the researcher and the final story told by the researcher to an audience' (Kvale, 1996, p.184). This understanding from the outset that the stories recounted by participants will be separated into parts or elements before being reassembled in the final report appears particularly germane to a dyadic study.

Box 1. The 37 sub-questions generated by the original research questions

1. What do parents understand by "learning difficulties"/special educational needs?
2. What do teachers understand by "learning difficulties"/special educational needs?
3. What are the similarities and differences between the two understandings?
4. What descriptors do parents employ in relation to their child's difficulties?
5. What descriptors do teacher employ in relation to the child in question at school?
6. What is the teacher's criteria of "success"?
7. How does the parent describe "goals/ambitions" (short/long term) in relation to his/her child?
8. What kinds of information are relayed/shared between the teacher and the parent?
9. What sources of information does the teacher draw upon?
10. Is the exchange of information/knowledge a two way process?
11. Is negotiation an element of "finding a way forward"?
12. If negotiation is an element of the parent/teacher relationship, how is it defined or expressed?
13. What are the signifiers of "success"?
14. Are there constraints on teachers?
15. Do parents and teachers have choices?
16. If so, what are the choices and how are they made?
17. What does the parent view as the teacher's responsibility?
18. What does the teacher view as the parent's responsibility?
19. Is there a mutual understanding of the respective responsibilities of parents and schools?
20. What is the nature of the relationship between the professional teacher and the amateur parent (professional/lay relationships)?

Box 1. The 37 sub-questions generated by the original research questions, cont'd

21. "Ideal models of partnership" - rhetoric or reality?
22. How do parents position themselves in and through their interactions with teachers and other education professionals?
23. How do parents understand the way they are positioned/ Do parents feel they are being "positioned" in a certain way by teachers?
24. How does the parent interpret his/her role and status as a parent?
25. What does the parent perceive to be the professional role/status of teachers?
26. How do parents link these two roles?
27. How do parents describe their relationships with teachers?
28. What motivates parents to seek additional help/information?
29. What kinds of information/help do parents seek?
30. What sources of information do parents access?
31. How do parents use this information/help?
32. What is the status of this information/help from the parent's perspective?
33. Does this information/knowledge/support serve to empower parents?
34. If so, in which ways?
35. Does this empowerment affect the parent/teacher relationship?
36. What is the nature of parental "knowledge"?
37. Is this knowledge valued by teachers (parental perspective)?

Box 2. Linking the interview schedule to questionnaire and sub-questions

Schedule question (Parents)	Sub-question	No(s) Q(s)
Why and when did you first become concerned about your child?	What do parents understand by "learning difficulties/ special educational needs"?	1,4
	Which descriptors do parents employ in relation to their child's difficulties?	Qs 3 - 10
Where did you look for help and advice? (e.g. books, Internet, assessment, specialist tuition)	What kind of information/help do parents seek?	29
	What sources of information do parents access?	30

Box 2. Linking the interview schedule to the questionnaire and sub-questions, cont'd

Schedule question (Teachers)	Sub-question	No(s) Q(s)
Did you pass on or share what you gained from this help with your child's school? (If yes, to whom?)	What kinds of information are relayed/shared between the teacher and the parent?	8,31,
	How do parents use this information/help?	Q11
Did you feel that the child had any kind of difficulties? If yes, how would you describe the difficulty?	What do teachers understand by "learning difficulties/special educational needs"?	2, 5, 6
	Which descriptors do teachers employ?	Q7
	What is the teacher's criteria for success?	
What kind of information, if any, was the child's mother able to give you?	Which kinds of information are relayed/shared between teachers and parents?	8
	Which sources of information do teachers draw upon?	9
	Is the exchange of information/knowledge a two way process?	10
	Are there constraints on teachers?	14
	What is the nature of parental "knowledge"?	36
What contributions do you think parents can/should make if their child is experiencing difficulties?	What does the teacher view as the parent's responsibility?	18
	Is there a mutual understanding of the respective responsibilities of parents and schools?	19
	What is the nature of the relationship between the professional teacher and the amateur parent (professional/lay relationships?)	20
	"Ideal models of partnership": rhetoric or reality?	21

Abbreviations:

Q(s) = Questionnaire question(s).

No(s) = The number(s) given to the sub-question(s).

4.10 Using N5¹⁰

My experience of analysing qualitative data involves the same non-linear reiterative process which, for me, characterises the research process as a whole. The analysis involves the constant revisiting of both the written and spoken word in order to generate an initial and on-going understanding and awareness of the data. I found this to be a complex and at times daunting process during which I became acutely aware of an increasing involvement with, and immersion in, the data accompanied by a sharpening of my sensitivity and perceptions as a researcher.

My decision to use a software program (N5) was premised upon a specific and personal need to facilitate the data analysis by rendering it more physically manageable. My choice of software was made only after deliberation and research into “which products did what”. Software designed to aid qualitative analysis is not necessarily suitable for all types of analysis. Some packages however are more adaptable than others are to different modes of analysis. I did not want to become a slave to a software package which dictates methodology. I wanted to use software which was flexible enough to facilitate my methodology. Had I opted for a “grounded theory” approach, for example, I think the full scope of N5 would doubtless have been invaluable. Nevertheless, I found that even my reduced use of the range of functions available in N5 led to efficient data coding and management without prejudicing intuition, creativity and understanding.

The initial process of importing the transcribed transcripts into N5 involved having to manually format each sentence into a text unit and the creation of sub-headers. This became the first stage in what was to become a continuous process of disassembling and reassembling the texts in a meaningful way. There is a temptation when faced with a mass of data and a schedule to meet to make premature conclusions, to summarise sections of text, and thus to overlook the subtleties within the transcripts. The critical effect in the early stage of the analysis of seeing each sentence as an individual unit of text is to neutralize those initial assumptions which inevitably arise in the preliminary stages of

¹⁰ N5 is shorthand for the fifth revision of Non-numerical Unstructured Data Index Searching and Theorizing earlier known as NUD*IST.

listening to the recorded interviews, and the subsequent transcribing and proof reading of the transcripts. Thus, the very process of utilising software can instigate a mode of reflection which continuously links the research questions to conceptual and theoretical frameworks, data collection procedures and analysis.

4.10.1 Categories, Codes, Nodes and Memos

N5 allows text to be highlighted and coded at “nodes” which can be grouped together in tree-like structures. Coding itself arises from the need to reduce and manage data before any theoretical conclusions can be reached. It is both a precursor to and part of the analysis, marrying description with theoretical work in order that meaning can be constructed out of the raw data. Coding qualitative data is not a risk-free strategy. It involves slicing through the data in order to produce standardised categories, a process which appears closely associated with the treatment of quantitative data. Coding qualitative material however involves grappling with the data so that the results do not produce purely descriptive methodological artifacts but become instead an empirical grounding for emergent theories. For me, it was the process of coding itself which was all important, rather than the meticulous construction of numerous nodes. The process involved careful reading, thinking and reflection which is captured in memos and annotations which run alongside the nodes. Together, this provides the infrastructure for writing up the findings and their analysis. The additional facility of being able to access and revisit data extracts in their original contexts allows N5 to operate as an efficient and fast editing tool.

Time spent researching the products available and experimenting with the software was time well spent. I realised, and thus avoided, the danger of producing a proliferation of nodes, whether structured into hierarchical trees or left as ‘free’ unattached nodes, which could preclude rather than facilitate an effective analysis of the data. My conceptual framework guided the process of inquiry and provided the original rough guide-map for the node structure. Categories were not however fixed and completely identified in advance but evolved during the course of the coding process. Some text units were coded under several nodes where they related to several different concepts or were unclear to me. All of this was noted in memos, again demonstrating a particular

mode of reflection which results directly from using the software. The software facilitates the incorporation of annotations and the writing of detailed memos. Although this is a process which is common to the analysis of qualitative material however done, the facilities of N5 allow the process to be fluid, ongoing and constantly to hand so the whole can be accessed at the press of a key. The memos and annotations become the canvas for sketching theoretical write-ups about ideas, relationships between nodes or categories, thoughts, reflections, possibilities and insights as they occur. Together they chart the analytic process of my increasing understanding of the data in a transparent format which is hopefully accessible to others. In Appendix 7, I have reproduced sections of the node index tree which show my growing conceptualisation of the dynamic relationship between interactions and the factors which impact upon them. I have included three sets of extracts from the node tree. The first shows the base data nodes, the second, some of the nodes created during my analysis of the preliminary study and the third section, shows how the nodes evolved during my coding of the Main Study data. Data coded at these nodes helped me to test my growing awareness of the potential significance of the 'community of practice' theory to my thesis.

4.11 Conclusion

In this chapter I have employed an innovative approach to describing my methodology. I have done so in order to demonstrate how the sharpening of conceptual and theoretical frameworks directly impact upon methodological choices and decisions. Building on the issues raised in the literature concerning the ambiguity of definitions of "special educational needs" I have taken the unusual step of including data in a chapter on methodology. I have done so in order to emphasise the importance of an area for potential research frequently overlooked in the literature. This is the space or opportunity for the joint negotiation of meaning which arises when either a parent or teacher voices concerns about a child in school. These concerns, which always precede and pre-empt any "diagnosis" of special educational needs, justify the undertaking of a dyadic study. This kind of verbal interaction, together with the giving of advice by teachers to parents, is part of the duty of care which, as is seen in the

judgement given at the beginning of this thesis, can directly impact upon a child's educational and life chances.

This chapter completes the first section of this thesis which has explored the conceptual and theoretical frameworks, the methodology and the method. I turn next to the empirical section of the thesis. The chapters which follow illuminate the empirical observations upon which my analysis is based and which lead to the conclusions in the final chapter.

Chapter 5. Introducing the Empirical Studies

5.1 Introduction

Having discussed the conceptual and theoretical frameworks, and provided a rationale for my methodology and method, I turn now to the empirical section of this thesis. This short chapter provides a backcloth to the empirical data chapters which follow.

5.2 The backcloth

The empirical accounts in Chapters 6 and 7 privilege the subjective and personal experience of participants. The accounts are set against a backcloth which reflects the current and ongoing debate about children deemed to have special needs and the debate about the roles, expertise and authority of those involved in the process of providing for them. Viewing parents as partners within education, and pupils as instrumental in their own learning, is enshrined in legislation (Department for Education and Skills, 2001). Policy recommending the forming of partnerships and development of collaborative relationships which benefit pupils, parents and teachers reflects the new rights and duties introduced by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001. Arguably, the SEN Code of Practice is intended to protect the rights and strengthen the position of children experiencing difficulties and their carers. Its implementation is intended to enhance the degree to which the contribution of all individuals involved in partnerships should be respected as meaningful. The Code reflects a growing understanding of the need to meaningfully involve both the children who are giving cause for concern, and the members of their families who may act as their agents, in educational decision making processes.

“Partnership” suggests a locus which permits negotiation and interchangeability of roles. Relationships which are built upon, or build towards, mutual engagement, a joint enterprise and a shared repertoire generate a strong cohesion of commitment and shared interests which transforms relationships into partnerships over a period of time. The sharing of narratives, interchange of ideas and negotiation of meaning amongst participants are the prime characteristics of the situated cognition perspective whereby learning becomes

essentially social and cultural occurring in social settings through dialogue with others (Lave, 1988).

Wenger's complex of ideas enshrined in the notion of the 'community of practice' provides the basis for a theoretical model of educational practices involving transformative and collaborative inquiry. It provides the vision of a potential application to the practice of parents and teachers who, theoretically, come together in a joint project constantly mediated by the perceptions of the needs of the child who is giving cause for concern.

The interviews I conducted for the Main Study were at primary school level where I expected the early identification and understanding of children's difficulties to be a prime concern of parents, teachers and schools. Early intervention, however, has yet to become the norm (Audit Commission, 2002), although around 40% of head teachers report that the proportion of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) in their schools increased in 2001. A similar percentage report that the proportion had remained the same (Archer, Fletcher-Campbell and Kendall, 2002). It is worth prefacing the accounts which follow with the caveat that there is great variability and much inequity in the way in which the one in five children identified as having SEN – almost 2 million in England and Wales - are currently served by the educational system (Audit Commission, 2002). Nevertheless, children with SEN account for almost nine-tenths of permanent exclusions from primary schools (Audit Commission, 2002)¹¹. From this perspective, one might expect this to be a rich field for co-operative educational practices offering much motivation for partnerships involving the sharing of knowledge.

Although parents and teachers may occupy different positions, each, nevertheless, is trying to address a young person's needs in a particular way. The potential exists however for both to become embroiled in different but overlapping personal and professional discourses often involving power and authority relationships. Both are involved in the receiving and providing of advice/information gathered from a diverse range of sources. These sources can carry differing degrees of "authority" in terms of perceived validity and status.

¹¹ Based on data collected by the Audit Commission in 22 LEAs, and including pupils with SEN without a statement.

The teachers in this study are positioned as both individuals with personal beliefs and philosophies, and employees who work within an organisation, a school, which acts as a locus of professionalism influencing their practices and authority. This is equally true for parents who are employed within schools or who act as school governors. All of the participants, irrespective of role or position, are involved in constituting a collective social practice which has a potentially conflictive and contradictory nature. Focussing upon interactions which revolve around the transmission of knowledge and information has the potential to bring to the fore a significant but under-researched area, namely, how individual and subjective understandings of the duty of care held by teachers impact upon relationships between parents and teachers (see Chapter 1). This is legal terminology which is not current in the vocabulary of either parents or teachers. It is, nevertheless, discernible and implicit within their conversations about the respective roles and responsibilities of parents and teachers vis-à-vis children's education. This tacit understanding is relevant to the substantive concern of this thesis which is to identify and analyse the implications of the variety of forms that parent-teacher relationships adopt, and the effects of these relationships upon the provision for children giving "cause for concern".

Parents who worry about their children at school normally express their concerns to the class teacher, usually the first port of call. However, it may be that 'teachers tend to sense that practical problems exist but they do not know their exact nature' (Husu, 2002, p.4). Given that the range of difficulties that children can experience is varied and complex, and that, at present, trainee teachers spend as little as half a day on SEN during initial teacher training (Audit Commission, 2002), it is hardly surprising that problematic relationships between parents and teachers can and do arise, and that some children's needs will remain unmet. The situation is further aggravated in schools which have few, if any, full-time teachers with a qualification in SEN, and where SENCo duties are allocated to one member of staff commonly a class teacher and/or subject coordinator (Archer, Fletcher-Campbell and Kendall, 2002).¹²

¹² The NFER report suggests approximately two thirds of schools have no full time teacher with post-experience qualification in SEN in a population of schools which have more than 10% of pupils on the SEN register.

Problematic relationships, if or when they arise, can lead to both resistance and agency, resulting in behaviours which are 'differentiated by personal histories of social participation' (LeVine et al., 1996, p. 254), and the possession and activation of social, cultural and economic resources. In this sense the 'self-constructing individual' develops within the opportunities and restraints of a broader social world while continuously being challenged by the necessity to resolve real-life situations (Valsiner and Litvinovic, 1996, p 56). These real life situations involve making choices and decisions. Although parents may be most influenced in their decision-making and taking by specific cultural models of child development in their own communities, teachers:

...have expectations that in part reflect their particular cultural traditions and societal ideologies (and which they share with the families with whom they work) but equally reflect a sort of professional culture shared internationally with other practitioners of parallel or equivalent education and training and experience with children (Edwards, Gandini and Giovaninni, 1996, pp. 284-285).

Edwards, Gandini and Giovaninni suggest the need for further study of 'the sources of both parents' and experts' development knowledge and goals'. In so doing they imply a difference in status between parents and experts. However, they then broaden their terminology to query the construction of 'adult' personal beliefs about child development. The researchers attempt to differentiate between informal experiences such as 'past family and life experiences, current experiences, exposure to mass media, and other meaning-laden communication systems of modern society', and formal knowledge which they suggest is to be found in 'childrearing literature, courses and meetings, paediatricians' advice, and research reports in magazines and newspapers'. This is a pot -pourri which leads into an unanswered question, namely 'And how much are parents and teachers aware of the differences of their perspectives?' (Edwards, Gandini and Giovaninni, 1996, p. 286). Answering this question is one of the objectives of this thesis which aims to identify the dynamics of so far undetected and unconceptualised aspects of parent-teacher relationships. As such it has the potential not only to clarify hitherto unanswered questions but also to raise awareness of different perspectives, to give audibility to sometimes unheard voices and visibility to those who can be overlooked.

The following chapters focus upon the empirical study which brings to light, and explicates, a continuum of parent-teacher relationships some of which have already been identified in the extant literature, and some of which surface for the first time. These form the basis of an analysis which attempts to objectively map and interrogate the factors which influence and impact upon parent-teacher relationships. The requirements of producing a Ph.D. thesis restrict the extent to which all accounts can be reproduced with the same degree of detail, however all the accounts have been subjected to the same scrutiny and have contributed equally to the overall analysis. This is a complex tapestry to unpack and subsequently reconstruct but it is the task which I have elected to undertake with a commitment to showing compassion on all sides.

Chapter 6. The Preliminary Study

6.1 Introduction

The preliminary study was designed as a first level of inquiry into parent-teacher relationships. The 10 parents who participated all had ongoing and unresolved concerns about their children's educational difficulties. Through their stories I hoped to be able to extrapolate and better understand the dimensions of, and the dynamics involved in, parental agency. For me as a researcher, these "heightened" parent-teacher relationships, revolving as they do around the resolution of children's often long-term difficulties, offer a magnified version of parent-teacher relationships in general. Parents employ a variety of forms of agency on behalf of their children, however this preliminary study focuses, in the main, upon one particular dimension of parental agency. The chapter explores the parental perspective concerning the ways in which teachers respond to, and value or otherwise, the information and knowledge that parents offer to schools. Understanding how schools respond to and deploy, if indeed they do, this potential resource provides a lens through which to view the dynamics of mutuality and reciprocity between parents and teachers who are both involved in the important task of meeting children's needs.

This preliminary study maps the stages in the parental endeavour to understand and meet their children's needs. The main themes elicited from the data became the analytical categories which emerged as my involvement with the transcripts deepened. The themes describe the initial confusion which lead parents to seek solutions and to embark upon a journey of potential empowerment through knowledge. The chapter describes their experience of that journey, the constraining influences and contentious areas, the existence of an unequal playing field and the negotiation of obstacles. The chapter concludes with parental reflections on their self-efficacy and an introduction into the Main Study which follows in Chapter 7.

6.2 The initial confusion

The parents spoke to me at length about their children's behaviour patterns, their own unanswered questions and times of anxiety and uncertainty.¹³ They were motivated to search for solutions by an initial perplexity which included puzzlement, bewilderment and confusion. One parent told me: *'I always knew there was something not right. [...] I knew he wasn't...stupid, but I knew there was a problem'* (M1), another said: *'Something is telling you something's not right. There's this problem with my child'* (M6), a third parent told me: *'First we ever heard of it was that he was being disruptive in class and always asking questions and interrupting etc., etc. And this was not my son'* (M5) and a fourth parent said: *'There must be some problem that he's got that another child who's getting on okay isn't experiencing [...] because I haven't got this perfect little boy that's behaving like everybody else's perfect little boy is behaving'* (M10).

From the transcripts I identified the following five situations as typifying the events or circumstances which generated parents' initial concerns:

Unusual or worrying behaviours observed by either the parent at home or the teacher at school.

Expectations of progress which were not being met.

A marked difference between the teacher's description of the child at school and the child as known to the parents.

Any suggestion of a learning difficulty or problem.

An intuitive feeling of "something not being right".

6.2.1 Seeking solutions

Once they became aware of a problem, the parents sought additional evidence, or new data, which would help corroborate, or more precisely define their understandings of the problem. Generally, this was accompanied by an expectation that this would generate solutions much in the same way that treatment is expected to accompany a medical diagnosis. As one father told me,

¹³ See 'Dewey and Reflective Thinking', section 3.3.1

he expected: *'Definitely diagnosis...I was looking to be told what was wrong and who could fix it' (F3)*. Put simply, for parents, the clear identification and understanding of problems is the obvious priority which precedes any possibility of remediation: *'If you don't know what the problem is in the first place then you're snookered' (M9)*.

During the process of clarifying their children's problems, the parents came into contact with a range of educational professionals within the school system¹⁴, not all of whom were able to help: *'The teacher called us in and said, "He's got a big problem," ...but she couldn't help us to what it was' (M1)*. Many apparent "explanations" offered by teachers were often unacceptable, serving only to exasperate and frustrate parents further: *'One particular teacher said, "Oh, my husband didn't start reading until he was eight"' (M7)*. Teachers' explanations, such as: *"She's getting on fine, she's not the slowest in the class. Yes, she can't read yet but that's quite common."*(M2) were often perceived as inadequate, and were at best, only tentatively accepted by parents. This kind of professional explanation often falls short of parental expectations: *'You've got a list of symptoms [...]. They're a professional, why aren't they diagnosing and saying "This could be the problem"'(M1)*.

6.2.2 Researching the problem

Finding out that a child potentially has special educational needs can propel parents into uncharted waters as this parent describes: *'Probably the hardest thing is where to look, so you go out in the big wide world and which way to go? [...]. It's like being in a big sea and you're sort of paddling around in the middle'* (M8). Parents often resort to undertaking their own research because they are unable to accept, with confidence, what they are told by professionals, and because they need a greater understanding of their children's needs. Across the interviews a wide range of potential resources for further information were cited including books, research reports, the Internet, television, radio, and libraries. Some parents seek additional advice from doctors, private educational psychologists, friends, colleagues, neighbours and relatives. However, the ready availability of many potential sources for further information can itself generate

¹⁴ See Table 1, Chapter 4.

further confusion rather than clarity, as this mother told me: *'So I called lots of things off the Internet [...] and I was thinking "Well, this is just too much for me. I'm a lay person, I could make things worse". So I scanned through and put it all to one side and I've never got it out again'* (M2).

Some parents join voluntary associations and support groups. One parent explained that: *'At the time you didn't hear much about autism, you didn't hear much about this that and the other. I thought well, if anybody's gonna help me or give me some advice on this, these are probably the people to contact'* (M6). Voluntary associations and support groups, run jointly by professionals and parent members, offer parents much needed information, advice and support. They also provide a further arena for research: *'I was desperate [...] I just felt that nobody was listening to me. I wasn't gonna use it as a label but for my own peace of mind, that I wasn't going mad. We had to take the time to find out'* (M4). Parents who contact these organisations are often seeking a springboard to further help: *'I actually originally started by thinking, "I'll go to the dyslexia society because they do these tests". I didn't know where else to go'* (M2).

6.2.3 Experiencing the journey

Parents described for me their experiences of the journey which they embarked upon as they sought to better understand and meet their children's needs. Their descriptions of the situations they found themselves in reminded me of Schon's description of the 'swampy lowland' where situations are confusing "messes" (Schon, 1983, p.42). Their accounts were peppered with incidences which were experienced as challenges, or potential barriers, to either their participation, or that of their children, in the decision-making processes in which they were both the subjects and objects. Such incidences often adopted the mantle of "critical moments" and determined the subsequent nature of their agency. Parents spoke about differences between their acknowledgement, understanding, interpretation, and definition of their children's problems or difficulties, and that of the teachers. They spoke of disputes which centered around the status and validity attributed to different sources of knowledge or information such as specialist information and assessments, and of judgements made about parental common sense or tacit knowledge. They were critical of educational provision,

pedagogical practices, processes, competencies and procedures including the monitoring of children's educational progress. Parents voiced their anger and concern about the damage done by teacher assumptions, (usually of low expectations), negative attitudes, stereotyping and blaming techniques. In their conversations with teachers, parents spoke of voiced and unvoiced agendas, negative responses, closure or dismissal tactics, prevarication, avoidance techniques and delaying tactics. They also spoke of differences in values and belief systems and their expectations of both teachers and the educational system. They expressed discontent with a system which they perceived as dictating roles and responsibilities, and which positioned parents in ways which constrained their participation in their children's education. Much of the above endorses findings from the extant literature given in Chapter 2.

6.3 Constraining influences and contentious situations

In the study, parents did not dispute that teachers sometimes work under difficult conditions. Their perceptions of the constraints which affect teachers in the work-place, and teachers' abilities to provide for children's individual needs, tend to echo those most highly publicised or voiced by teachers or their unions, namely lack of time, lack of money and class sizes. Although most parents readily acknowledge that teachers work under constraints, the degree to which parents sympathetically accept that these limitations provide an adequate explanation for less than ideal provision is far from uniform. Thus while one parent accepts the inevitability of limitations: *'I think they're all too overworked to make it ideal. I can't expect teachers to look after him...like a favoured son, but I think, by and large, they're okay'* (F3), another parent expresses the opposite view, prioritising her son's needs over any question of limited resources: *'I know their hands are tied and I know they've got budget constraints, but at the end of the day, I'm not interested in their budget constraints, all I'm interested in is my son'* (M5). Schools often cite financial restrictions, but for many parents this is an unconvincing explanation: *'Whether it was a case of "Well, there's not the funds there to do the stuff, therefore if we ignore that it's there, we don't have to do anything about it," I don't know. [...] I think a lot of it was a case of they didn't know what they were doing'* (M9), and: *'I think it's money, and I think also, teachers don't like their authority questioned, they don't like parents standing up*

and in some ways backing them into a corner to do something. They just want to be able to live their own lives, and fill their own little forms in and go their own way' (M5). Some parents feel that teachers' limited knowledge, due to inadequate training, is a more likely "explanation": *'It's just sheer lack of knowledge on their part and I would go back to their training again and say that they should know what they are looking at'* (M1). Parents are also aware of hierarchies within schools which impact upon teachers, and thereafter parents and children. One mother, for example, said: *'(The teacher) was very supportive, but there was only so far that she could go and at the end of the day it was the head teacher's decision and he was the one that we met the brick wall with'* (M4). Another parent, herself a teacher, refers to the effects of both an inefficient use of resources and the lack of support that some teachers experience: *'It's very frustrating, I can see the frustrations of the parent, but being the teacher I know how limited it is what you can actually do, you don't get a lot of back-up'* (M10).

One highly contentious area is the different kinds of knowledge possessed and accessible to parents and teachers which has implications for the types of initial, and sometimes ongoing, discussions between parents and teachers (Miller, 1996; Billington, 2000). One parent's account of why she and her husband withdrew their son, Jason, from his "special" provision serves to illustrate how multiple knowledges can influence parental agency. In their decision-making, Jason's parents draw upon their past experience of the school system, the knowledge they have acquired through undertaking their own research and their own intimate knowledge of their son. This range of knowledge allows them to make a critical evaluation of the provision on offer and subsequently to reject it on the grounds that it was not differentiated to meet their son's individual needs. Jason's parents had engaged in numerous conversations with his teachers, but ultimately they were unable to gain the appropriate support for him. From their perspective, pedagogical inflexibility underpins provision that they believed was both inappropriate and detrimental to their son¹⁵. It seems that the school's

¹⁵ Research conducted by Rathbone in conjunction with the Centre for Inclusive Education and Special Educational Needs, 2001 found that 'almost half of parents interviewed believed that their children had not made progress and may have even regressed. This regression appeared to be cumulative and the belief was that it was often linked to inadequate support' (Rathbone, 2001).

acceptance or understanding of Jason's difficulties was conditional upon his parents' compliance in accepting the fixed package of provision irrespective of its appropriateness. As a result of withdrawing from, and thus rejecting, the special needs provision, Jason received no extra support: *'He's just in with all the other kids in the mainstream'* (M8). The school ceased to provide an Individual Educational Plan (IEP): *'because he's not within the system anymore'* (M8) underlining perhaps, that the socially constructed criteria which define "special educational needs" can relate more to the provision available than to the assessment of individual need.

The open questioning of teachers' expertise and judgement by parents is frequently experienced as a "negative episode" by teachers. Open criticism can unbalance the 'positive and deferential role' that educators seek for parents (Lareau and Horvat, 1999). Alongside poor professional relationships with colleagues, and lack of resources, difficult interactions with parents feature as identified 'specific stressors' for teachers in the work place (Gersch, 1996; Male and May, 1997; Griffith, Steptoe and Cropley, 1999). However, the very situations which generate stress for teachers can reverberate and operate as direct constraints upon parents. One parent, a school governor, found herself facing this dilemma: *'I felt in a very difficult position because, maybe I was asking that question because I had more understanding than I would have done as a normal parent. [...] I don't know if she's not being singled out in class. Have I made it worse? I don't know. [...] They know I will bring them to task, I will question, because I'm not accepting that they can just do whatever they want to do. I don't know if it's been worth it'* (M2).

Many parents equip themselves to question and monitor professional practice and decisions. For one parent, being well-informed is the means to distinguish between truth and fiction, thus: *'I think you need to know your facts. If you go in and you get an awful lot of waffle from people then a) you've got the knowledge to fight back with and b) you recognise the waffle for what it is'* (M9). Parents tend to differentiate amongst sources of expertise giving greater value and credence to expertise available external to schools which is perceived as being independent and objective. One parent however confounded this, suggesting that distrust of professional knowledge extends beyond the school gates: *'We*

kind of realised that we were just on a treadmill here, that whatever specialist field the person was in, they said that was the problem. So it left the parents completely up in the air wondering what the Hell was wrong and why it was. [...] Some of the specialist, alleged experts, I think they've got tunnel vision; they're only interested in their own bag of tricks. They definitely tell you they're an expert, you tend to take their word for it so therefore you follow that path' (F3). Corroboration for this came from a parent-teacher: 'At the end of the day the mother knows more about the child than any professional. A professional can come in and assess them for an hour or two hours and they don't really know the child' (M10).

The range and variety of different sources of knowledge increasingly available to parents and others encourages the querying, evaluation and even rejection of pedagogical decisions that traditionally would have been located almost uniquely within the realm of educational professionals. Although increased parental empowerment through knowledge spawns a questioning of professional expertise, resulting in a loss of deference towards professionals, parental control over circumstances and situations is always incomplete. One parent told me: *'I certainly wouldn't know what I know now[...]. I think knowledge is a powerful thing to some degree, because without it, you can't push, because you feel they are the professionals, they are supposed to know what they're doing. That's your assumption. But at the end of the day, they are learning all the time themselves so...it all follows hand in hand. They need advice and support themselves' (M6). Another parent, a teacher herself, explains: 'I've read so much. [...] If my son's seeing the educational psychologist and professionals you think, "Well, they know more than you do", but I know now that they don't. I probably know more as a mother than I even do as a teacher. And I think a lot of what I've learnt has been through being a mother' (M10).*

Many different kinds of knowledge are relayed between parents and schools. The acknowledgement or otherwise by schools and teachers of the status of different kinds and sources of knowledge (examples of which include intuition, common-sense, judgement and expertise) is pivotal to understanding the motivation for parental agency: *'And I thought, well, if they're just treating his behaviour, it doesn't work, we've tried for years. [...] The behaviour's just a*

symptom of something else, isn't it?' (M10). It is obviously not possible to extrapolate from parental accounts alone why some sources of knowledge are more acceptable to schools than others, although this appears to be the case: 'There was I thinking "This is gonna be the end of it; present this (private report) to the head teacher and she'll say "Oh yes." And it was the beginning really,...it meant nothing [...]. The headteacher just said "Well, you do surprise me," and passed it off like that' (M1). The rejection of external reports is just one example of the power that schools and teachers have to act as gatekeepers in respect of which knowledge is privileged. Viewed through a Foucauldian lens, this becomes a disciplinary technique, a mechanism for excluding or limiting the participation of individuals: 'Always when I suggested something they would say, "Yes, we'll do that", or whatever, but they were never proactive [...] I just think they had no awareness of the problems that she was suffering...and so every time I tried to point something out they had a rather negative attitude towards it (M7).

Another contentious area which surfaces in the data relates to the different understandings of what it means to be a "professional" or to act in a "professional" manner. This can result in "them and us" scenarios, as this parent explains: *'You feel as if you've failed. In my professional life I come across people that are from all different backgrounds, and it's my job to persuade them to analyse the problem, to give them the opportunity, the options that they've got and then persuade everybody to be on board, to, to take this on and to grasp it and go forwards with it. [...] You go up the school and ask a straightforward question, you never get a straightforward answer. When it comes to actually doing something that's more important than your job, looking after your own children's education, you get nowhere. And you just get a brick wall. And it's "Sorry, this is our line", and it's as if they're not real people. And I know they are real people, I know teachers, most of which are very nice, but what is it about them and their attitude? I find it very, very difficult (M5). Another parent, a school nurse, had a similar experience: 'I've worked in lots of schools around the borough. I have discovered that teachers on the whole regard themselves as a profession apart. [...] I'm a professional, I'm a nurse, but unless they're in dire straits and they've got a child bleeding they don't want to know me. My*

contribution means nothing. They seem to think themselves as, you know, apart' (M1).

6.4 An uneven playing field

It would be erroneous to assume that all parents share identical experiences of involvement in their children's schooling. One mother volubly expressed the range of responses that most parents in the study experienced at different times during their interactions with individual teachers and schools: *'They'll either do one thing or the other and that is one: they will just turn against you, or two, they will stroke your fur and just tell you what you wanna hear and then do absolutely nothing at all; or three, they will support you. Now I've been on the receiving end of all those three scenarios'* (M5). Parents possess different kinds of emotional, cultural, social and economic resources demonstrated by the range of strategies they are able to employ. However, although parents may seek to be actively included in their child's schooling the degree to which this becomes possible is mediated by the school's response to the strategies they employ: *'I used to go into the school and help with reading and things. I did know most of the teachers on a friendly basis, but that annoyed me even more because if I was prepared to go in and help them, then... I don't mind doing anything for anyone but I expect something in return. No, that's not right, I don't expect something in return but if I need something in return I expect people to be equally willing in return. And they weren't'*(M9).

Crozier (1998b) notes that working class and middle class parents hold different constructions of their roles and relationships with their children's schools, indicating the effect and implications of power relationships (see section 2.3.4). Parents spoke about the uneven nature of the playing field which positions some parents and children in a more advantageous position than others: *'(I felt) sorry for other kids whose parents don't push things as much. If they're struggling and the teachers aren't picking it up and if their parents aren't interested, for want of a better wording, or perhaps haven't got the education themselves to know that their child is struggling...the child doesn't stand a chance. [...] In the school they had an awful lot of, to say working class families sounds very snobbish, not the right wording. There's a lot of rougher families in the area, a lot of travellers that have been re-housed'* (M9). An awareness of social and cultural complexities

resonates through the thoughts of several of the parents who express the hope that their individual actions would have a wider social application above and beyond their immediate personal interests: *'I used to think well okay, I'm fighting this for David, but maybe the school's actually learning something from it and maybe it'll help someone else as well'* (M9).

A pervading sense of unfairness leads some parents to "soul-search" as they seek to justify their decisions and actions. Some parents worry that their "gain" might be at the expense of another child or family: *'I was always worried that if I kicked up enough of a stink, that money would be taken away from another child'* (M4). However, parents do not see the solution to equity, or inequity, of provision, nor the need for help and support for all children and parents, as their individual responsibility. Instead, they tend to view it as a requirement, or prerequisite of, a just and fair educational system: *'It doesn't mean to say that if parents are not able to actually do what they can do for their child, that they should be ignored. The help should be there to help those parents to do what we did'* (M4), a view reiterated by this parent-teacher: *'I think that maybe the schools and teachers should take on more responsibility; it's their pupil, it is their problem and it is their professional duty to do what they can for that child'* (M10). These extracts interpolate a dual ethical dilemma, namely the management of social commitment and responsibility with personal conflict over individual action.

6.5 Negotiating obstacles, avoiding confrontations

The extent to which parents are able to negotiate around constraining influences and contentious situations in order to achieve their objectives links directly to their personal capacity to cope with the risk-taking implicit in transgression and non-compliance. Some parents describe episodes and experiences of alienation or exclusion, either of themselves or their children, often arising from events involving contestation or challenge (Lareau and Horvat, 1999). Such moments can be pivotal to the parental decision-making process generating acts of agency which take on the mantle of repair mechanisms. This parent, for example, explains her decision to pay for private specialist help for her two sons saying: *'I wanted somebody to understand them both, and they didn't get the understanding at school'* (M1). This supplementing of school provision proves to be a risk-taking and constraining venture which forces her into an ambivalent

situation: *'It's "Oh well, he has private tuition, we don't have to bother too much." [...] Well the relationship was cooler and "Oh well you've gone off on your own." [...] I wanted to keep a good relationship with the school and yet you want to do the best for your children' (M1).* Another parent describes how her decision was used to mask elements of persuasion and coercion: *'They used the fact that I had found a private tutor as an excuse not to support Nick. I also at one stage threatened to let Nick fall behind, so therefore then they would have to do something about it. "That is your choice Mrs. Smith" was the answer' (M5).* Risk-taking can be a direct response to barriers which effectively operate to exclude or limit parents' participation in the schooling of their children. Both the taking of risks and the successful overcoming of obstacles to participation depend to a large degree on the possession of the right kinds of social, economic and cultural capitals. These, together with constructions of self-identity, help some parents to generate the personal resources necessary to avoid confrontation and to maintain a high level of resistance if or when necessary. This non-confrontational parent, for example, found compliance to be the easier option: *'I'm not a confrontational person so...I found it was easier to try and comply with them' (M1),* whilst for another parent, overcoming barriers, paradoxically, become a personal spur to negotiating challenges: *'I think I was treated as an infant rather than an equal. [...] It made me more determined to get on with things, and gave me less and less respect for the people that I was dealing with, which actually made it easier from my point of view to keep going' (M9).*

The parents in the study tend to reject or resist imposed subjectivities which label or (re)create either themselves or their children as 'passive objects of professional knowledge' (Allan, 1999, p.111). One parent related to me how her son was: *'Told he was a mother's boy, that was very upsetting. You come across as this pushy parent, this, this problem, this...fussy woman. [...] I was condemned as being a working parent and that was the reason he was a mummy's boy. Relationships were strained, it was...very much "Well, you know, we're the teachers, we're the professionals and...you're just the parent"' (M1).* A second parent echoes this: *'I did get very negative responses from them. I was treated like I was a neurotic mother, with nothing else better to do, I didn't have a*

job, didn't go out to work, therefore I was a bit bored and that was the reaction I had, or that's how I felt (M4). A third parent describes her emotional upheaval: *'I know for a long time, I blamed myself as a mother, I wasn't doing anything right, [...] (I felt like) people would judge me, whereas now I know that that's not true'* (M10). But for one parent, being positioned and treated as a "bad parent" poses no difficulty: *'The mother from Hell I think it was quoted because I wouldn't take it lying down. Its like water off a duck's back, 'cause it makes no difference to me. At the end of the day, I'm paying their wages, they're supposed to be teaching my son and they're not'* (M5).

6.6 Evaluating the effectiveness of agency

Towards the end of the interview I asked parents to reflect, in hindsight, upon the actions they had taken, and to evaluate the effectiveness of their agency. This brought to the fore their personal criteria for, and interpretation of "success". Their responses illuminate how connections are made between 'self and self, self and other, and institutional discourse' (Popkewitz and Brennan, 1998, p.5) and how individual experiences of subjectivity are tied to self-image and identity by 'a conscience or self-knowledge' (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983, p.212). This parent, for example, said: *'I'm very non-confrontational and so is my husband. I do wonder whether we should have done more in the way of fighting. I suppose that the rule was "as long as they're happy".... We've got two well balanced, self-confident sons who are not influenced by other people, who are strong in their own minds. This is what makes me think that education isn't everything'* (M1). A second parent answered my question saying: *'I would say (my actions were) semi-successful, because she (my daughter) doesn't have much self-esteem and she isn't confident. [...] I've thought about it a great deal, and in a way I sort of blame myself for not doing something about it earlier. [...] I should have trusted myself instead of...leaving it to the teachers'* (M7). And a third parent told me: *'I think we have (been successful) in the sense that (my son) is now in a special school which is more suitable for him. But, I feel that if he'd had the chance to go to special school earlier, get that one-to-one, small group support, he may have stood a good chance of actually being able to go to secondary school. He'd have been able to cope a lot better'* (M6).

6.7 Conclusion

This preliminary study has explored the experiences of a small number of parents who, motivated by their desire to address their children's difficulties, embark upon a potential journey of empowerment through knowledge. These parents want to play the role of the pro-active, knowledge embracing parent in parent-teacher partnerships and community of practice building in the SEN context. From their accounts however, it would appear that the particular kind of agency they employ, together with the concerns which motivate it, is not always appreciated by schools. Some teachers and educational professionals construe such agency as a contestation of the kinds of discursively organised knowledge constructed in schools. If, or when, parental agency is construed as a criticism of official pedagogical practices, it can become a risk-taking venture. Parents can, and do, find that exercising agency on behalf of their children can provoke potentially problematic and conflictive parent-teacher and school relationships.

Viewed from a Foucauldian perspective, many of the problematic situations which parents encounter with teachers are underpinned by control strategies, with teachers' responses to parents simulating a version of governmentality (Foucault, 1977b). Some teachers may deliberately pursue particular interactions with parents with the intention of shaping, altering, or determining their actions or behaviour in order to render them more governable or manageable (Foucault, 1988). From this perspective, teachers and schools function as agencies of regulation and control over parents and their homes (Brown, 1993). If it is assumed that parents' relationships with teachers are essentially relationships between lay people and professionals, then these relationships can be (re)constructed in terms of asymmetries of power and status suggesting that parent-teacher relationships are underpinned by a traditional view of professionalism, which privileges status, autonomy and authority. From the parental accounts, this appears to be an ineffective model for consensual partnerships, because it embroils teachers, whether actively or passively, in the constructions of webs of power (Ginsburg, 1997, p.8) which distances them from parents. Partnerships predicated upon co-agency, equality and a sharing of knowledge and information, may require a shift in focus away from the repressive attributes of power towards potentially more productive relationships which could

include, for example, opportunities for 'expertise trading' (MacLure and Walker, 1999, p.12).

This preliminary study produces an unfinished tapestry of constraints which interact in complex patterns. However, the study has viewed relationships with teachers uniquely from the perspective of parents. By default therefore, it provides only a limited reading of the micro-practices which characterise parent-teacher relationships. This is rectified in the next chapter which presents the narratives and personal philosophies of pairs of parents and teachers who occupy different positions but share an involvement in trying to address children's needs. The preliminary study does, nevertheless, provide a substantial, if partial, insight into some of the contextual influences which affect parent-teacher relationships. It brings to the fore some of the tensional moments which adversely affect parent-teacher relationships, jeopardising the establishment of working partnerships and by default, the educational and life chances for some children.

Chapter 7. The Main Study

7.1 Introduction

Chapter 7 opens with two alternative versions of an “ideal partnership” which draw directly upon the words of the parents and teachers who participated in this research. The synopsis of these accounts raise some subtle, and in some cases not so subtle, nuances of difference which highlight and reflect alternative understandings of mutual and reciprocal communication. These preliminary, alternative versions of an “ideal partnership”, with their diverse understandings of mutual engagement, reciprocity and negotiated enterprise, are re-visited in the subsequent dyadic case studies of parent-teacher narratives and dialogues which constitute the main body of data upon which my analysis draws.¹⁶ Although the presentation of the case studies reflects the variations in length and depth of the original interviews and transcripts, each dyadic relationship is reported descriptively and includes a summary of its defining features. These defining features are instrumental to the analysis and findings presented in Chapter 8.

7.2 Ideal models

During the interviews I asked each of the parents and teachers, in both the preliminary and Main Study, to describe their ideal model of a parent-teacher partnership. The question was not framed with particular reference to children with special educational needs, although some of the answers reflect this assumption. This question proved to be the one which participants found the most difficult to answer. The answers, which were given after much thought and reflection, were understandably less spontaneous than the responses given to my other questions. From the answers I was given, collated and summarised below, it appears that, by and large, parents and teachers seek to work in partnership with each other. However, their answers reflect many of the deficits that teachers and parents consider to be occurring in their relationships to each other. Their responses, by default, function as a “wish-list” reflecting ideas as to

¹⁶ My interviews with Peter's mother and teacher (P5/T5) are not included below for reasons given in section 4.8.1.

what an ideal parent or teacher “should” be. The synopsis which follows utilises, where possible, the vocabulary of participants.

7.2.1 Teachers’ understanding of an ‘ideal model of partnership with parents’

The teachers say that they would like parents to talk openly to them, to be available at all times to exchange notes and to discuss and compare the child’s behaviour at home and at school. They feel that constant communication, whether by meeting or talking on the telephone, would provide consistent feedback allowing parents and teachers to keep each other informed thus avoiding a build up of problems on either side. Teachers say they want parents to discuss problems and disagreements with them, not to be defensive but to ask questions and find out what is going on. This sharing of information and ongoing discussions would help teachers to ascertain whether the child’s problems are school based or arising from something or somewhere else. Teachers want to be able to talk to parents, to try to sort out problems together. They want parents to be friendly and approachable, easy to talk to, enthusiastic and eager to do things and to take their advice. The ideal relationship would be professional but not too personal, and the atmosphere nice and friendly so that problems could be sorted out sensibly and rationally. Teachers want parents to trust in the teacher’s professional ability, to understand where the child is at, to be realistic about the child’s ability and to understand what the teacher is trying to achieve with the child. They want parents to support their decisions, to be understanding and to see the school’s side of things as well as their own.

For teachers, working in partnership with parents means exploring children’s difficulties together and agreeing on a course of action. This includes activities which can be done at home, things that can be done in school, avenues to be taken if there is cause for deeper concern, lines of questioning to be pursued, and people who should be contacted. Teachers want parents to enthusiastically follow up strategies implemented in the classroom. They would like parents to do background reading on topics covered in school, to read books on a suggested book list and to visit any places suggested by them. They would like parents to follow their suggestions for things to make with the children and to sit down with them to encourage and help with homework, and to make sure it is

done. In school, teachers would like parents to participate by taking children outside to hear them read, and to join in walks and school trips. Finally, teachers say that an even partnership with parents entails both sides in discussion with parents viewing education as a joint project.

7.2.2 Parents' understanding of an 'ideal model of partnership with teachers'

Parents want teachers to find the time, on a regular basis, to sit down and talk with them, and to give regular feedback. They want more regular contact and communication, whether written, a telephone call or a message on an answer phone, to discuss the appropriateness of strategies and to monitor and assess the child's progress. They want to be warned promptly by teachers if problems, or potential problems arise, so that these can be dealt with speedily. Parents want to be kept up to date with the child's needs as and when they change. They want teachers to make them feel confident about contacting the school, and ringing up 'off the hoof', rather than such contact being seen as an intrusion. They want teachers to be more responsive to parents who try to contact them, to return their phone-calls and to arrange meetings promptly when requested.

Parents want teachers to be honest with them and really friendly and sympathetic to their child. They want a genuine, open two-way relationship with good communication characterised by listening on both sides. Listening to parents means taking on board what they have to say so as to maximise the information gathering not just about learning but about what is happening in the home as well. Parents want schools to really value parents' contributions, and to actually ask them for their own ideas about what they want to do. They want teachers to understand the parental perspective about the child's problems and not to diminish the role of parents by adopting a 'we're the teachers, we're the professional and you're just a parent' attitude.

Parents expect teachers to realise when something is wrong. They expect them to be informed and educated about children's difficulties and to be pro-active in giving information. They expect each child to receive a suitable education differentiated according to their intelligence. They believe that teachers have a professional duty to do their best for every child. They expect schools to accept and take on more responsibility for pupil's educational problems and be better

equipped to deal with them. They do not want teachers to isolate them by blaming them or making them feel that they alone are solely responsible for children's educational difficulties and problems.

Parents see the ideal partnership in terms of mutual support and an exchange of information with good communication and interaction. They feel that both parent and teacher should be approachable and open to ideas. Both should be reasonably informed or involved in a process of finding out together. Ideally, schools would take the initiative in identifying needs, getting the parent in and working with the parent. Parents see education as a two people job, with both backing each other and with listening and respect on both sides. They want a very open relationship where each person feels that they can discuss issues without any inhibitions and with nothing hidden. They do not want to be made to feel that the teacher is God, they want to be respected and spoken to as equals.

Finally, parents want a relationship with teachers which is not just centred around the teacher's personal opinions of the child. They want teachers to be less rigid and less set in the 'these are good children, these are naughty children' mode. They want every child to be recognised as an individual with unique strengths and weaknesses. Parents want to feel confident that the teacher knows and responds to each child's individual needs rather than fitting them into the mould of the other children. They want teachers to move away from categorising children and putting them in boxes which accompany them through school. They want to have complete confidence that the teachers are aware of everything that could be done for the child and are doing their best to deliver appropriate provision which meets the needs of the child. Overall, parents believe that good liaison with teachers who are responsive and implement what is needed will avoid parents having to fight to attain support. Teachers should want to provide extra resources so that parents are able to supplement or support what the child is doing in school. Schools should not be insular but view partnership as the bridge between home and school.

The two sets of answers above bring to the fore similarities and differences in parents' and teachers' understandings of mutual engagement, reciprocity and a negotiated enterprise. From the answers given by both parents and teachers, it

is clear that both prioritise the importance of constant and consistent communication. However, there are subtle, and in some cases not so subtle, nuances of difference which highlight, and reflect, alternative understandings of mutual and reciprocal communication. From the teachers' perspective, there is much that parents could, and should, do to assist them in their work. The lengthy list of expectations has a barely disguised sub-text which defines both the "good" and the "bad" parent. Compliance is a requirement of the former and any failure to comply, by default, is assumed by teachers to indicate a lack of a shared understanding of education as a joint project. Teachers, by requiring that parents be compliant, automatically place them as subordinates in the educational endeavour.

The ideal partnership, from the parental perspective, is somewhat different. There is a wider remit which goes beyond the narrow focus of teacher expectation of the parental role and is unremittingly focussed upon negotiating a way forward for the child. For parents, the 'ideal' partnership would maintain the child's needs, objectively viewed and free from assumptions and stereotypification, at its core. It would be a field of negotiation characterised by mutual support, exchanges of information and constructive interactions which demonstrate mutual listening and respect on both sides.

Parents and teachers share much common ground. Both seek to work in partnership with each other and believe effective communication to be the key issue in establishing effective partnerships. For many teachers effective communication with parents appears to be dependant upon, or at least linked to, an expectation that parents participate in the education of their children in very specific tasks and ways determined by the school. Teachers, schools and some parents as well, assume that these activities will provide the bridge between home and school resulting in effective communication. However, for a range of reasons, not all parents are in a position to comply with the school's expectation of the appropriate parental role. Parents who cannot, or choose not to, be compliant can feel that they, and their children, are disadvantaged in their endeavour to work in partnership with teachers, or even that they are stigmatised by teachers.

Both parents and teachers seek to be joint owners of children's education and ask for mutual respect and support in this endeavour. Ultimately however, the responsibility of caring, providing, and "doing the best for the family" remains with parents. Parents and teachers tend to have different expectations and priorities which impact upon their understandings of mutuality, reciprocity, participation, support and respect. It seems almost inevitable that this will give rise to conflicting definitions of "what matters". However, within these diverse agendas, expectations and priorities lies the potential site for collective meaning making through the negotiation of strategies. Some parents want teachers, many of whom are young, inexperienced and childless, to acknowledge the "partialness" of their knowledge base and to join them as learners working together in a joint mission focussed upon the needs of the child. They want exchanges of information to be reciprocal, open to discussion and for the children to be meaningfully involved as active participants. Underlying this are parental expectations of the role of schools and their understanding of the duty of care owed by teachers to every child.

7.3 The studies

Johnny (P1/T1)

8 year old Johnny has struggled at school from Year 1. As each year passed so his difficulties with learning became more apparent to his parents. Having repeatedly raised her concerns about her son's educational difficulties, Johnny's mother feels that that she has consistently been 'fobbed off' by teachers. This response explains the ambivalence which affects both her self-image and Johnny's progress: *'I did view it differently but because I was told there wasn't a problem. I just thought it was myself being overprotective'*. Johnny's current teacher, (T1), has a particular interest in children with SEN. In her acknowledgement of the very real difficulties that Johnny is experiencing, she is, for this parent, the first teacher to break the pattern of "fobbing off".

Johnny's teacher is adamant that the intransigent policies of financial prioritisation, instigated by the Head, fail to prioritise meeting the needs of the children: *'I can tell you right now, extra money would not be spent on children in this school. Children have to pay to come and see their own shows that are provided here at the school, and if they don't pay, they don't get to see it. [...]*

She (the head teacher) runs a very tight budget here, and extra money is not spent on resources'.

The accounts of both mother and teacher are peppered with examples of problematic liaisons with the school. Johnny's mother is both a parent and a salaried employee running the 'After School' club. This is a dual role which she finds difficult given the explicit hierarchy within the school which positions staff above parents: *'The Head talks to other members of staff there, and she calls them by their first name but when she sees me coming it's, "Oh Mrs XYZ..."...as though I'm not part of it. I'm still classed as one of the parents, even though I'm working for her. It's a bit downgrading, I think' (P1).*

Liaison for Johnny's class teacher, a long term supply teacher from overseas, is hampered by her unfamiliarity with the rules of the game concerning what is, or is not, considered appropriate behaviour: *'It's different here, I don't know if I'm comfortable, I don't know if the school allows, you know, phone calls...so sticky'.* Suspecting that Johnny might be dyslexic she seeks advice from her colleagues within the school. This approach is however thwarted when she is told *'there's nothing that you can do in this school. It's not considered a special need'.* Both mother and teacher talk about their relationships with the school which are marked by experiences of marginalisation and isolation. Johnny's teacher reflects upon her relationships with her colleagues saying: *'I don't feel other teachers respect my opinion. I get the feeling that it's, "Well, you're not from around here, you don't know a thing, how things are done". I don't know for sure, but I feel like it's, "Oh, she doesn't know what she's talking about". I feel that it's my colleagues and above that I'm fighting and not parents'.* Within her class Johnny's teacher operates a buddy system which provides a life-line for vulnerable children. However, although this strategy appears successful it is not used across the school. Johnny's teacher explanation for this, in answer to my query as to why this was the case, suggests a lack of communication and liaison across the school: *'I guess it's just never been discussed. [...] I would say that there's not an actual time set up for it.... like an exchange of ideas or anything like that, which is terrible.'* The peer support that the children in the class offer each other provides a poignant contrast with other practices in the school.

With Johnny's interests at heart, both parent and teacher choose to challenge and resist the formal identities constructed for them by others. They opt instead to use alternative strategies. Johnny's teacher refuses to be coerced. She justifies the position she adopts, saying: *'I know I'm not in (my home country), but I will refuse to give up on a child. I will not sit back and accept the fact that he's on a waiting list. I'm just not gonna do it.'* Johnny's mother undertakes her own research, and arranges a private assessment with an Educational Psychologist. This is an act which she finds easy to both rationalise and justify: *'I took him out of school to do it because I felt if they weren't prepared to put the time into it then missing a morning of school was the least of our worries'.*

Summarising the defining features:

This is a parent-teacher partnership which operates as an isolated small unit positioned within a bigger unit which is characterised by micro-political tensions. Both mother and teacher experience non-inclusive practices and a deliberate resistance to the freeing up of boundaries within the school. For the mother, the differentiated use of forenames and surnames functions as a boundary marker, emphasising who is included, and who is excluded. Whilst their mutual feelings of alienation appears to contribute negatively towards their joint culture of suspicion of this particular school's practices, it undoubtedly contributes positively to their shared resolve.

The partnership demonstrates mutual engagement and a negotiated enterprise between parent and teacher. However the potential product of this partnership, namely, meeting Johnny's needs, is constrained by their independently experienced difficulties in acquiring a collective repertoire of negotiated resources. The lack of access to the greater fund of knowledge and expertise potentially available is particularly daunting for a teacher from overseas. Outside of her relationship with the children and their parents, Johnny's teacher perceives herself to be constrained to isolation, working in a private domain which Troman refers to as a 'culture of individualism and privatism in which working collaboratively and engaging in shared professional learning does not occur' (Troman, 1996, p.76). Her account suggests that Johnny's school does not operate as a site for joint knowledge production where theories and ways of

understanding can be developed, negotiated and shared and benefits accrued. Her account also suggests that there are no shared ways of engaging in doing things together, no rapid flow of information nor propagation of innovation, and no sharing of discourses within the school. The boundaries of the parent-teacher partnership and the potential for a productive 'community of practice', are constantly being mediated and compromised by the positioning of the relationship as a small unit within the bigger unit of the school.

Adam (P2/T2)

8 year old Adam is an adopted child with Asperger's Syndrome. His adoptive mother (P2) has a breadth of experience and knowledge as both a parent and teacher of children with complex difficulties. Adam re-did his reception year at the same school where his mother taught. He stayed there until Year 2 when he, but not his mother, moved to his present school. The Numeracy and Literacy hour were to change the format of Adam's school day, and thus his experience of school: *'He basically couldn't cope at all, [...] he fell to pieces.'* The relationship between parent and teacher was positive if tested to the full at times: *'I was in the school, I wasn't a parent outside of the school. So it was very difficult for her (the teacher)'* (P2).

Adam's need for Ritalin three times a day for his ADHD provides a good example of the real dilemmas and power issues experienced by a parent who is employed as a teacher in the same school as her child. On one occasion, the office staff, whose responsibility it was to administer the drug, forgot to give Adam his medication. This provoked an incident during assembly which proved difficult to resolve. Adam's mother describes what happened: *'Adam had been sat next to somebody who was also a bit volatile and he was then made to miss his play because he couldn't sit still. As a parent and a teacher I disagreed with what happened. [...] I complained. But it's very difficult because then it comes back to you that "If you weren't a teacher here, you wouldn't have known", and ..."You're not a parent here, you are a teacher". So I'm not complaining just as a parent, I'm doing it as a teacher as well. But that didn't go down. I think that's where the relationship between me as a parent and that school, started to break down. And the thing the schools tend to do is, ...as far as they're concerned, when the*

child is in the school, they are in charge' (P2). The deteriorating relationship between parent and school precipitates a change of school, but attempts to move Adam to another school do not progress smoothly: *'We couldn't get him into a school because of his special needs. [...] Adam is different...why, why...? If he had been felt right...but his special needs wasn't...alright'*. Adam was eventually accepted at his present school where I interviewed his Year 3 teacher. In hindsight his mother reflects: *'My big mistake was to try to move him in a SATs year'*. As a teacher as well as a parent, she is well aware of the agenda to drive up educational standards and the subsequent pressures upon teachers in relation to attainment levels: *'I feel I have to apologise to every school I go to. I say to them, "I know they're not gonna to actually do anything for your SATs results"'* (P2).

Six months after the transfer, Adam's teacher (T2) recalls that the first weeks progressed smoothly. Having Adam in her class is both a steep learning curve and a transformative experience: *'I've never had a child like Adam. Behaviour obviously, it affects you and the whole class, ...I don't think I probably would be as stressed now, no.'* Adam's teacher is not unsympathetic, but as a relatively young teacher she has had little experience of working with children like Adam, or his mother. It is a situation which she finds difficult. At times the problematics of the parent and teacher relationship become confused with issues about Adam's behaviour: *'I've had probably the worst term ever, because I was stressed about him. He's one of these children that slowly grind you down . [...] I really want this year to be over now. This whole thing has been (stressful). No, not because of Adam, because...well, I suppose because of her, really'* (T2).

Parent and teacher initially work together and mutually decide the most appropriate way of introducing a support assistant for Adam into the class. From the teacher's perspective, the school has met all the statutory requirements: *'We've done everything we were meant to do [...], he has everything'*. The disputes which arise centre around strategies employed to fulfil procedural requirements. From the school's perspective the means of communication is secondary to the primary requirement of keeping parents informed. Adam's support assistant delivers daily reports to his mother verbally in the playground. Viewed through the eyes of the parent, the very public way in which this

communication is conducted appears to contradict the effort already made not to identify Adam as a child who is different, a child with a “problem”. The different knowledges available to the teacher-parent offer a potentially rich source of expertise which could be harnessed as a resource. Instead it become the source of contention: *‘I find it difficult - I suppose as a teacher as well, - because I think they should already know this. There are some things I think all schools seem to be quite insensitive about, and that is one area, the coming out into the playground and telling - it's fine if your child's had a good day. Except they're not doing it for any other child so even then all the parents will know that there is something slightly different about this child, because after all nobody ever comes out to tell them...you know, whether their child's had a good day or a bad day, so why is this person doing it with this child?’* (P2)

Adam's mother, as a teacher herself, accesses the same pedagogical knowledge base as his class teacher. As a questioning parent, her pedagogical knowledge appears undermining to Adam's class teacher. Practices, which might be accepted unquestioningly by other parents, are consistently queried: *‘She will quote things at you “If the child can't read ninety percent of the words on their own then it's too hard.” It's just like no other parent would have said that to you’* (T2)¹⁷.

Adam's mother has clear views on her children's schooling: *‘I'm sending them to learn, to be educated, to learn to read, not just be contained within the classroom and not learn anything’*. She has however learnt through past experience that offering suggestions to other teachers can be an onerous task. Past rebuttals have both distressed and angered her: *‘I had actually been told that I must leave it to the teacher to decide because she knows better than I’*. The insistence upon using certain techniques and strategies with Adam, already tried and proven unsuccessful in the past, raises issues of impositions and injustice: *‘They were imposing something on me they had never discussed with me, talked with me or anything. Why was it then I had to have that done, but the teacher didn't have to have it done? And how do I not have any knowledge about Adam? Have I got*

¹⁷ The reference here is to a method used by teachers to assess the reading age of materials in order to ensure that the books which pupils are given are of an appropriate reading level.

no knowledge about his ADHD and him as a child? How can a teacher who's never been on a course for ADHD, know more than I do? [...] I think that schools need to actually realise, that the parent is the one constant factor in the child's life. Educational Psychologists change, doctors change, teachers change, headteachers change, SENCos change, but the parent is the one person there through everything. And I don't think schools value that at all, or even realise that' (P2).

Adam's teacher resolutely maintains her position of authority in the classroom: *'I do things the way I see them because I have a reason for what I do'* and a stressful relationship develops. She is angry that what she views as an unequal distribution of resources does not satisfy Adam's mother: *'It makes me quite cross actually. I just feel that everything has been done for him and it's still not enough. There are so many other children who have got needs that aren't, you know, well, are being met but would all benefit from one-to-one support, and would all benefit from six reading books a week. [...] We're all trying to make everything, as normal as possible for him, or as normal as it can be. So why then should he get his reading book changed six times?'* (T2).

Adam's needs, acknowledged and undisputed and soon to be encapsulated within a Statement, become the site and manifestation of a power struggle. Without the legal status of a Statement, Adam's mother is forcibly constrained and restrained: *'I don't feel I should go in to the school and start saying "Excuse me, but that's not acceptable." I've not got a leg to stand on, because the borough support in actual fact could be taken away at any moment because there's nothing there that says he should have it' (P2).*

Adam's mother seeks to work collaboratively with his teacher and the school: *'What I want is for us all to get together and talk about Adam, what difficulties Adam had, and come up with a strategy that we're all happy with; that I understand and I can support, and work with. [...] Home and school are together as a partnership, and if you don't get that right, that child's not gonna learn, because you're not going to have ...that bridge, because they've got to work with the parent at home and you at school. So it is a two people job' (P2).*

Adam's behaviour is consistently monitored and assessed, with stickers being awarded as and when the teacher feels it to be appropriate. Putting stickers on a chart is a reification, a representation of "good" and "bad" behaviour. As a strategy it serves the double function of an act of surveillance and a visual record of Adam's behaviour on an hourly basis. Adam is positioned as a passive recipient rather than an active member in his own education. It is only through the words and eyes of his mother that we can begin to see and have some, albeit limited, understanding of the world that Adam inhabits, of what is and what is not meaningful to him: *'Yes he will tell me things about school, but it's usually the helicopter that's flown over, the fly that's walked up the wall, the crack that was in ... He doesn't distinguish between an average day, a really good day, a sort of slightly difficult day and a really bad day. So if he comes out with five stickers, that's as good as the day he comes out with one sticker or no stickers. There's no differentiation between...the like of the day'* (P2). This kind of insight, if shared, has the potential for altering classroom practice. It represents a potential resource which, if accessed, could benefit not only Adam, but also his teacher and other pupils.

Summarising the defining features:

This relationship is essentially one between professionals with different degrees of knowledge and experience. Both are teachers, but only one is a parent. This has led to a relationship between parent and teacher in which power relationships and multi-membership of communities impede the opportunity for negotiating meaning. The relationship degenerates over time reaching a point where irreconcilable disconnections nullify any attempts at working in a partnership akin to a 'community of practice'. The obstacles prove difficult to overcome. For the relatively inexperienced class teacher, the need to establish her status as a professional with expert knowledge is all important. For the parent, the objective is to help her adopted autistic child to improve his future chances in life. It is an objective which draws upon all her resources and governs her practice, overriding the potentially harmful effects of openly criticising and undermining her colleagues. The common ground that might be expected to exist between educational professionals becomes compromised by diverging priorities.

For the teacher/parent, as for the parent/school-employee, and parent/governor, dual perspectives and roles are not easily reconcilable. As a teacher she offers an “insider perspective” as to why some teachers elect to construct boundaries which marginalise parents: *‘It’s professionalism: they’re a teacher, you’re a parent. They must therefore know more than you. I think it is this idea that...if they let parents in, they don’t feel in control, they feel threatened’* (P2). As a parent, she is further constrained by the controlling mechanism of obtaining a Statement of Special Educational Needs for her son. When in place, this may, or may not, provide the forum she seeks for the active participation of both herself and her son in a working partnership which will value her contribution as both a parent and an experienced professional.

Billy (P3/T3)

11 year-old Billy is described by his school as having ‘emotional and behavioural difficulties’. For both Billy’s mother and his teacher, family circumstances dominate the interviews. Billy’s teacher, assuming that I am interested in researching “good” models of partnership, establishes from the outset that, from her perspective, Billy’s home situation and circumstances are key determinants in their relationship. She is quick to distance herself and the school from any (implied) problematics in the relationship with Billy and his mother: *‘I don’t think they blame school in any way. I mean the thing is school seems almost secondary to all this, this is why this is such a bad child to look at. I mean the relationship between the parents and the school is so secondary to the relationship between each other, I don’t think she would blame school at all, because I can’t see how she would, but she would just blame her husband and he would blame her...I think’* (T3).

Billy’s mother has always recognised that her son’s behaviour has been ‘*extreme at time*’. She constantly sought help from many sources, beginning with the nursery school: *‘I started with the teachers and the deputy head teachers my GP who’s sort of a family friend as well as our GP, and anybody that would really listen, health visitors...anybody like that.* Teachers tended to respond with the familiar response *‘Don’t worry, he’ll grow out of it’*. Initially, Billy’s mother had “one-to-one” sessions with the deputy head on a regular basis: *‘I had been*

saying all along *"There's something not...quite right, there's something amiss", "He needs additional help, I need additional help"*. Whilst the deputy head *'was genuinely concerned and always showed a great amount of support and understanding'*, relationships with individual teachers varied over the years.

Billy is a child of divorced parents with a split family life. His mother believes him to be the a victim of a "blaming" culture: *'My children's education has been compromised through the circumstances we've been in for the past five years, but it's also been compromised through...the lack of understanding...that divorce and...the difficulties involved with that, bring on'* (P3). Billy and his immediate family have coped with many traumatic experiences, with little if any support from the wider family: *'I've got my mum and my dad's an alcoholic and I don't know where he is. I've got a brother who's useless. For the past five years I've probably done everything and anything by myself'* (P3). The ongoing and unresolved stressful home situation continues: *'Living with somebody and then divorcing them and still five years on, still be arguing with them and still being called an f-ing whatever in front of my house and in front of my children is grossly unacceptable...my human rights and the human rights for my children is affected and I just loathe the man who does it. I just treat him with absolute contempt'* (P3). Billy's mother is only too well aware of the traumatic effects of his home life: *'(There was) a particularly painful time [...] Billy learnt how to abuse women and that's what he did. He's seen his father hit me and Billy even hits me [...] Billy behaves exactly like his father,...a spoilt, nasty, horrible little brat that if he doesn't get his own way, will just create merry Hell. And that's how his father behaves. Billy's seen too much, far too much. But I can't change that. [...] We've never behaved like a normal family, whatever a normal family is. [...] There was always arguments, there was always conflict, there was always, an atmosphere. As much as I tried to still carry on with a normal...sort of, day to day life, it was always very difficult and I was always very strained and stressed'* (P3).

Billy's mother is aware of his unpopularity with his Year 6 teacher and does her best to compensate for this at every opportunity: *'Billy's Year 6 teacher didn't like him. She looked on him as if he was just a naughty, disobedient, unruly child. He would never be picked to do anything nice at, sort of, school productions at*

all. No nothing... he was the back end of a cow for the school pantomime, it's that that sort of reflects on his low self-esteem and everything. But then I made the cow costume and it was the best ever cow costume going.... So...I built his self-esteem out of that...the back end of the cow!' (P3) Believing her son to be a victim of circumstances beyond his control leads Billy's mother to attribute a local meaning to his role in the school pantomime¹⁸.

Billy's teacher allows her understanding of Billy's home environment to influence her practice in the classroom: *'It's outside the classroom really and his language and his attitude towards other people. [...] It's all based on...the reaction he gets at home, and the fact that his parents let him play them off against each other, they have no contact between themselves, Billy gets what he wants. So, he expects it at school, if he treats us the way he treats his Mum, particularly, which has come from his Dad, then he'll get what he wants. [...] It's his character traits, but you can see where they've come from, unfortunately. He's a product of both of his parents'* (T3). She absolves the school from their responsibilities and justifies it by referring to the "grapevine" *'I think it's quite open around here. People come in and tell me what happened the night before in the street and all the rest of it'* (T3). Billy's mother, although aware of the situation, finds herself powerless to change it: *'We've become, the local soap opera for...people who quote themselves as being friends ...and I've had enough and I don't wish the children or myself to be victims of this any longer'* (P3).

Relocation, and the benefit of experience *'I know what's good and what's bad and what works and what doesn't work, because I've been round the houses so many times'* now offers the best opportunity for a fresh start: *'The slate will be wiped completely clean. [...] What I'm hoping is that when we do relocate and settle down I'll then be able to find something, counselling, for him there, that nobody will know about other than me and him. And he can at last...get rid of his*

¹⁸ Economies of meaning reflect a plurality of perspectives. Economies of meaning can refer to many different artifacts and occurrences. An artifact, for example, might be the assessments utilised by educational psychologists. The tests used to generate the reports on children are designed by specialists who give them meaning in the context of their own practice. Teachers and parents however, often have to produce their own meanings of the reports as they incorporate them into their practice. In the same way, events and occurrences in primary schools which may have meaning to teachers in their own practice, can become imbued or invested, as in this case, with local meanings by children and/or parents.

scary monsters. Because that's what has happened; the kids and I have all had these, sort of, big scary monsters that we're different and we don't fit in' (P3).

The teacher's macrosystem of beliefs, values and practices may explain her ambivalence towards Billy who appears to be making good progress within the National Curriculum: *'At the end of his SATs he got two fours and a five...which would assume he wasn't special needs, but he was. He managed to get there, but his English mark was just a four, so in real sort of terms he's only a level three still at the end of Year six' (T3).* She struggles however to convey his educational difficulties: *'He's never had any...any sort of lead towards a Statement, because he's never been...that poor academically or that awful in class. It's outside the classroom really, and his language and his attitude towards other people' (T3).*

Billy's mother believes her son has educational difficulties that are being overlooked or subsumed by assumptions: *'It was put at various parents' evenings that, perhaps he's not getting enough sleep and he doesn't know where he stands with you and his father and it was more than that. But she (the class teacher) couldn't ever look beyond that. We're boxed, divorced, broken family, Billy's seen as somebody out of that box. Dysfunctional family. Broken family. Broken home'. She fights, unsuccessfully, for him to be viewed by his teachers as an individual with the potential to overcome and succeed: 'I've asked him to be tested I was told he wasn't bad enough. You have to be really bad to get help. Everything has to be rated on how bad they are, and if they don't measure to a certain bad scenario then they're not bad enough. What happens to these children that are...in the middle? He is different from other children. My child is not normal. It's that I've come to terms with and I don't want him to have a label, he's intelligent and he's got the capabilities that far outweigh what he demonstrates now' (P3).*

The school trip in Year 6 is almost a non-starter for Billy due to his teachers' low expectations of him: *'We were worried about taking him in case he did one of his famous running off tricks and we said we just wouldn't...'. In the event, the trip was unproblematic and again, his teacher demonstrates her ambivalence about*

him, saying firstly *'He found it difficult'* and then *'He was all right actually, he was fine, he didn't shout at anyone, he was quite calm. So...he was okay'* (T3).

Billy's teacher confirms that the aims of a Year 6 teacher *'are towards the end of the year and their SATs and their academic work'* (T3). This preoccupation with SATs appears somewhat at variance with Billy's mother's aspirations of what an appropriate curriculum and education for Billy might encompass and offer: *'I think the teachers viewed his difficulties as he was just...a naughty, undisciplined child. I viewed his difficulties as yes, he was occasionally naughty and undisciplined, but...eighty per-cent of the time it was not his fault. It was the dysfunction that he has. [...] My children don't go to school to learn anymore, they've gone to school to become a statistic that makes the school look good in league tables. They don't go to school to learn anymore, they go to school to be ...a number. I want my children to learn about things. But it seems these days that, "Well if that's not in the National Curriculum, we really can't talk about that, because we have to talk about water three times in a year". I think the whole thing has let children down. They're like sausage meat, they're just forced through the system and hopefully they'll come out...jumbo sized, chippolatta or party size. I don't want my children to be part of that. They just become... part of the system and I think they just feel sometimes overawed with the system. It's sort of...the lunatics have taken over the asylum, really'* (P3).

When support for Billy is finally offered by the school, it is not unconditional but is part of a package: *'The bargain was that Billy would have that care and assistance...if myself and my ex-husband would then have complementary counselling, which we did, until my ex-husband walked out, "He wasn't gonna listen to any more f-ing rubbish" and that was it'* (P3).

The divorce necessitates changes within the structure of the family. Billy's mother becomes the head of the family with reduced finances. The situation forces her to find a more remunerative job which curtails the time she has to participate in school activities. Interest from the school wanes as a result: *'I believe the attitude towards me and the children changed. When I was fortunate enough to be home, even when I was working shifts, I would still commit to doing things at school to go and help with cookery. [...] I was one of the nice mums*

then that went along and helped. And then when I couldn't do that because I had financial ...things to meet, we then became categorised. We weren't seen as so important and integral. I was very committed and would help at all the jumbles and do the PTA stuff, and do everything I could and then I couldn't because of financial constraints on me' (P3).

Interestingly, for her degree dissertation eight years ago, Billy's teacher had undertaken research in two schools relating to parental involvement in the classroom. This provided us with common ground for discussion. In the first school parents *'thought they ran the school'*, in the second school *'the parents thought they had no influence and yet really their involvement was very similar'*. (T3). In Billy's school there is a similar unvoiced consensus as to the limits of parental participation: *'I don't think anyone ever sits down and thinks about it, it's just certain things you don't mention to the parents were exactly the same in both places, the things that they don't get involved in are exactly the same in both places. I don't know if I agreed with it, but it was what I found, that it was almost the same'* (T3). What results is a placatory appearance of participation which operates on the school's terms. There are *'parents who think they run the school, but I think it's probably the same again. Really they don't, they're given more responsibilities but they're not important responsibilities'* (T3).

As a student, Billy's teacher came across a particular model of partnership which she discussed with me in relation to her current relationship to Billy and his parents: *'I like the idea of the school being the middle, but the parents coming in and out all the way round. So you've got the school as the core for their educational needs first of all, and then the parents coming in and out, but the school being the core of it. So...you can try to work away from that in a situation; so home is out here somewhere and this is school and this is where they're secure hopefully and I think it's to some extent that's what Billy's been like. School has been quite secure and it has been quite stable, and it's everything else that he can't cope with all the way round [...]. There have been occasions where I felt I've been marriage guidance counsellor and nothing to do with educational support or anything like that, but I'd rather it had been "school is school" and try to separate the outside, what's actually going on, but have lots of contact with parents. With most children that works, because really what's going*

on outside isn't that different, but in this case it's so different and so difficult from outside school' (T3).

A vicious cycle of assumptions envelops Billy, his mother and his teacher. It is difficult for this model of the school as *'being in the middle'* to be effective in practice whilst Billy's teacher's reading and interpretation of the family's situation holds such an influence upon her practice: *'I put a much stronger weighting on the way that his parents treated him than they did [...]. Although both say they're supportive, they're not at all supportive of one another which makes it pointless to say something'* (T3).

Billy's teacher is, whether consciously or unconsciously, involved in defining "what matters and what doesn't matter": *'The things that parents worry about are completely different to the things I worry about, and all the personal friendships and all those sorts of things seem secondary; unless they're a real problem they're secondary to me'*. (T3) The Year 6 holiday, which for many families will be the first occasion that they have been separated for any length of time, provides a multitude of learning opportunities for all involved. Preparations for the week proffer an opportunity for schools, parents and children to work together as a community. The project provides a space for learning to be mutual and collective, a process of social participation where boundaries can be crossed through joint engagement in practice. The teacher refers to the instructional structure and pedagogical structure of the school trip as she views it whilst making assumptions about the viewpoints of parents, who not unnaturally, will have concerns other than the mechanics of information transmission: *'With the school trip, parents were worried about what they'd eat and where they'd sleep and all the homely things, and I'm worried about what they'd learn. And I was trying to say "Well, this is our aims for what they're gonna learn in this week" and the parents don't give a stuff what we're gonna do when we get there as long as they're gonna eat properly and go to bed and have a nice warm bed to go to. They're not worried about what work they do. Could of said "Well, we're gonna do nothing all week and they're just gonna play on the beach" and they would have been quite happy with that'* (T3).

Summarising the defining features:

Billy is typical of an increasing number of children in schools today who are the product of “broken homes”. Many of these children, like Billy himself, are subject to the ‘pathologizing’ or ‘blaming’ culture, which produces social arenas in which children suffer the consequences of their difference (Billington, 2000, pp.2-3). Billy’s mother pleads for him to be seen as an individual, free from the indignities and negative effects of being labelled and the apparent predictability of limited achievement which presents, from the teacher’s perspective, as the natural order of things given his home situation. For Billy’s mother the viewpoint that learning capacity can be shaped and limited in this way holds no currency. She rejects what she sees as the Fordist principles of standardised mass production of learning whereby children are required to fit in with the system, rather than the other way round, and pleads for a more flexible framework for personalised learning. Whilst accepting that Billy is a part of a less than ideal home situation she disputes the way in which her son and his difficulties are submerged under a banner which appears to proclaim “dysfunctional home equals dysfunctional pupil”. This viewpoint colours all social interactions between Billy’s home and school limiting the potential of the school to function as an effective context for his development.

Billy’s mother and teacher are unable to negotiate a workable definition of “what matters and what doesn’t matter”. Indeed, there is no evidence of any attempt to negotiate a shared meaning which is an integral part of the informal ‘communities of practice’ formed when people pursue a shared enterprise over time. There is no emergence of a site for meaningful forms of membership, empowering forms of ownership of meaning, and ultimately, the identity work which is the vehicle for carrying experiences from one context to another. Without making such opportunities for learning available, the school offers Billy and his mother a restricted version of, and opportunity for, participation and engagement. This is a parent-teacher relationship which exhibits the kinds of complexities, tensions and conflicts which result in dislocations preventing relationships from developing into effective partnerships.

Wenger uses the term 'participation' to refer to both the process of taking part, and to the relations with others that reflect this process. Participation in this sense suggests both action and connection, encompassing membership in social communities and active involvement in social enterprises (Wenger, 1998, p.55). Billy's mother description of how, for her, an experience of participation became an experience of non-participation and/or marginalisation, reflects how boundaries of communities can be delineated, not simply as demarcations of "in" or "out" but as part of a complex social landscape. Her previous engagement in shared, mutual activities with the school fail to generate any sense of reciprocity, resulting in a disjointed perception of membership which affects her sense of identity.

The school trip project offers the opportunity for the crossing of boundaries, the experiencing of different forms of engagement, repertoires and enterprises. For this potential to be realised, Billy's teacher needs to engage with parents in a shared practice which involves the constant fine tuning of the experience and competence jointly available. The potential reward of this shared practice lies in the transformation of new insights into knowledge and the creation of a learning community of parents and teachers. Instead, Billy's teacher uses the power she has to decide what matters and to close dialogues. This she is able to do whilst maintaining a degree of sympathy towards both the children and their parents. Nevertheless, she appears unaware of her own complicity in a closure of thinking which affects how truths are manufactured and knowledge is produced. By problematising her pupils' families, she, whether knowingly or unknowingly, sets in motion dynamics which are played out within the power relations of school and home.

Finally, practice, according to Wenger 'is about meaning as an experience of everyday life' (Wenger, 1998, p.52). Everyday life for Billy and his family has been fraught with difficulties which they seek to overcome. For Billy's mother there are just *'too many battles to fight'* (P3). Billy and his family relocated within a few months of these interviews and began a new life elsewhere.

Judy (P4/T4)

Judy's parents first became concerned about her when she appeared to be slow to speak. Hearing tests were conducted leading to three sessions of speech therapy. The family lived next door to a retired head teacher and his wife who was a remedial teacher. From the age of three and a half Judy went regularly to her neighbours who began *'teaching her sounds'*. In spite of the extra input from an early age, her parents concern grew as they noticed how she struggled to remember things. This additional input from her parents and neighbours initially disguised her difficulties. On starting school, Judy looked like a: *'quite above average child to be honest, which was probably why her problems weren't detected early'*. As the other children progressed Judy appeared to plateau and then fall back: *'Everyone was overtaking her. She was going back down rather than going up'* (P4).

In Year 2, her parents' concerns grew, and difficulties were confirmed by the class teacher. The SENCo tested Judy and came up with a list of concerns: *'The list they gave was like "She has auditory discrimination problems". Hello. What on earth.....am I supposed to know what that means?'* Although intimidated by the language of the report, Judy's mother persevered: *'You get two seconds to read this two, three, four pages and it's like,...some big long word and I'm thinking "God, that sounds serious." I looked it up in the dictionary when I got home and I read her "g"s and "d"s were too high and low'*. Undaunted and highly motivated, she undertook her own research, contacting other parents, looking on the Internet, and reading books: *'I sort of, self diagnosed her because she was just so like all the things I'd read'*. Advice from school professionals regarding the benefits or otherwise of external assessments was mixed. The SENCo prevaricated saying *"Well it's up to you"*. *She couldn't really say yes and she couldn't really say no'*, whilst the class teacher offered some more meaningful advice: *"Off the record, mother to mother, I'd go along with your instincts"* (P4).

Contact was made with the local Dyslexia Association who provided a list of tutors and educational psychologists. The family elected to follow that route, and Judy was assessed privately by an educational psychologist who confirmed dyslexia. The report was passed to the school but there was no feedback. At

this point Judy began to receive private tuition from a dyslexia specialist in addition to the help with Maths that she receives from her neighbours. As her mother says: *'She's still being tutored quite hard. [...] They're both like friends to her. She's happy as Larry to do them both'*. Year 2 was a successful year but in Year 3 Judy was taught by an inexperienced teacher who was: *'Ever so negative, she found Judy irritating and me irritating because I went up to the school quite a lot to see how she was getting on. She thought I was over-protective and over-fussy of my little precious child'* (P4).

Judy's mother describes her daughter's current teacher as: *'Delightful, he's very open to what you say. Whether he acts upon any of it is another matter. He's very laid back where education's concerned. He's a very Christian man, he does teach them certain things, to be nice to human beings [...], but, as for whether their tables and their spellings are learnt properly he's not so worried'*.

He, in turn, points to the class motto "Be kind, Be happy" as the personification of his personal philosophy, ideology and priorities. This motto, which visibly adorns the classroom wall, encapsulates his practice as he sees it: *'That's what I ask the kids to be and in any case that's what I like to be as well. I do certain kind of stuff with the children, I take them out on trips and things. I like the old thing about gelling together. I think it's most important that we all...work as a team really and get on. More important than testing and more important than the National Curriculum, much more important is the development of the child, maturity and learning to live with other people and so on. So, I'm not that keen on slaving away at the National Curriculum for the hour of the Literacy hour and the hour of the Maths and all the rest of it. You have to do it, but I will drop it if I feel there is a burning issue. See, the way things are going now, we have to stick to the rule book all the time and as I've been a teacher for so long, I haven't got that long to go, I'm not too worried about being told off for not doing this and not doing that. But I will do the thing, curriculum, but if something crops up... I will give more time to that than I should under the National Curriculum. I give more time for the social thing, it takes precedent over the rest. Don't suppose I'm supposed to say that to my Head...'* (T4).

Judy's teacher is himself a father of three children, none of whom have given any cause for concern. Although he has taught for 26 years, the process of working in partnership with parents is not one he has actively considered or formulated. This I discovered when I asked him, as I did all the participants, to describe his 'ideal model' of a parent-teacher partnership: *'No idea. I've no idea what a model relationship between parents and teachers would be. [...] I can't answer your question really'*. With a little encouragement from me, he describes his relationship with Judy's mother as *'reasonable'*, and *'good'* linking both adjectives with the concept of compliance: *'She's very keen that the child does actually do the work the school (sets)...so that's a good relationship I would say. [...] What you want to have is anything that you send home which you think is useful to come back done, you'd obviously want the parents to be understanding and see the school's side of things as well, [...] to...obviously to comply with what I'm trying to do in class i.e. homework and stuff given in'* (T4).

Judy's mother has always been proactive and is confident that this approach has been instrumental in helping her daughter: *'I think one of the most fortunate things was that we did something when she was young. It's a slow process but you've gotta keep going in to see the teacher. I think to myself it's...because most of the things I've done, I've done. I don't mean they've done. [...] You've got to go out and find out for yourself and then go equipped. I've been very proactive in getting everything done'*. This strongly held belief, however, is not borne out by the teacher's account. All the information and reports passed by Judy's mother to the school although *'scanned'* (sic) by the current class teacher have had little influence upon his practice.

26 years in education has left this teacher unimpressed by any kind of professed expertise. His words suggest that he has had little experience during his career of any of the three dimensions which demonstrate the existence of a 'community of practice' with educational colleagues. For him, there has been little, if any, shared discourses, no joint knowledge production upon which to draw in his daily practice within the classroom: *'As regards the Educational Psychologists, the amount of "normal" children who are in the school is amazing! They're all "normal", with no problems, know what I mean? In all the Borough people, it's all, "normal child". I'm talking about behavioural ones particularly, ... "normal*

child,” so the first question you ask them “Well, why is the behaviour so bad then?” If it's a private test it's ... useful, but...limited, again... parents' information is limited, psychological stuff is limited, everybody is limited, including the teacher. The teacher at the end, always has the question “Well, how do you solve the problem?” Because identifying it is fine, but how do you solve it? What do I do now? Tell me what to do next’ (T4). These words contain a sub-text which describes how children’s needs may be reified on paper but remain unsupported by enabling dialogue.

Summarising the defining features:

This is perhaps the most surprising model of a successful relationship to emerge and the one I would least have anticipated to find. This apparently unproblematic parent-teacher relationship, which has none of the characteristics of a ‘community of practice’ (as discussed further below), is built on paradoxes and sustains itself through a lack of communication. This benign spiral of unintended consequence is, perhaps, a good example of the old adage ‘ignorance is bliss’!

Belief systems link into personal senses of identity, which are themselves ‘an integral aspect of a social theory of learning, inseparable from issues of practice, community and meaning’ (Wenger, 1998, p. 145). This teacher’s deeply ingrained beliefs underpin and direct practice within his personalised territory, the classroom. This is a claim to territory which both creates and inhibits the emergence of a ‘community of practice’. The partnership which is created between the teacher and his pupils incorporates many of the features which suggest the existence of a ‘community of practice’, but it is marked by the exclusion of parents. As such, it provides an example of the bounded process of community building, and the demarcations and contradictions which characterise social life and practice.

Alex (P6/T6)

11 year old Alex has a very able twin sister who is in the top sets at school whilst he struggles in the bottom sets. His mother is a well-informed and experienced special needs assistant who draws upon her own experience to question what she is expected to accept: *‘I’ve since been told that you can’t classify any child*

having special learning difficulties until they are in Year 3. I think, working with Year 2 now, in retrospect, I can see it in children' (P6). Her decision-making in relation to her son again reflects the difficulties inherent in reconciling the different positionings which result from multi-membership as a parent of a child in the Junior school, and as an employee in the Infants School. As a parent she has met in the past with prevarication, reassurance and dismissal. In her employment her knowledge is respected. As a well-informed parent she is another mother who occupies the ambiguous space between the professional and the "lay" parent.

Alex's mother (P6) and teacher (T6) are on first name terms: *'We became quite good friends last year. [...] Because she does work in the school (she) is quite knowledgeable about education, and she would listen to me and would accept everything I said, whereas normally if you have a parent that has different views to you, they will argue their point'* (T6). Parental compliance is important to this inexperienced teacher who shows a certain ambivalence in her relationships with parents. Whilst eager to be seen as a "listening" teacher she is quick (perhaps too quick) to be dismissive, finding apparent solutions by apportioning blame and defining roles: *'If it's important to the parent, then in some ways it has to be of some importance to you. Sometimes they tell you things and you think, "Well actually" you know, like one parent came and said, "Can you keep an eye on my daughter and tell me when she's getting tired, because I don't think she's going to bed early enough". Okay...what you want me to write down every time she yawns or something, you know? Well this is nothing to do with me really. Yeah, okay, I'm concerned your child's tired. Now you've told me why she's tired, so now it's your job to do something about it'* (T6). Her lack of experience leads to an immediate and unquestioning reading of the situation. This may mean that an opportunity for gaining valuable insight has been missed, possibly leaving the parents' worries, and potentially the child's problems, unexplored. This teacher, like Billy's teacher (T3), unquestioningly displaces responsibility away from the school, and relocates it by problematising the family.

Alex's teacher describes his mother as *'an incredibly supportive parent'* suggesting a relationship which is qualitatively different from relationships with those *'non-supportive'* parents who *'won't hear their children read, don't help*

them with their homework, come in and kick up a fuss if anything goes wrong'. Perhaps as a result of her inexperience she leans towards constructing strategies for parental involvement from a 'one size fits all' perspective: 'I've got some parents that work full-time and that becomes quite tricky because they say, "Oh, we haven't got time to do, as parents, to do homework". Well, I actually have to turn round to them and say, "Well, maybe you ought to think about your priorities"' (T6). This inexperienced teacher prefers compliant parents who recognise and support her and assimilate her values.

Eighteen months into her career, she is still learning "how to deal with parents": *'I don't think they can teach you pro- that sort of thing. I'm still learning now how to deal with parents. I made a major cock up a couple of weeks ago, and had to be dug out of it. We've had sex education lessons this half term and I had parents come in and complain about the video. And I dealt with it in the wrong way, and my Head actually had to write and bail me out of a meeting I'd arranged, and then organised a proper meeting [...]. Me being me would try and help the parents as much as possible to understand what we're doing, and I said to these two mothers - that I would put a meeting together to explain further the content of our sex education programme. And, my Head, turned round and said that I wasn't to do it, because actually they'd already been given X, Y and Z other opportunities. Well, they didn't come to the meeting you see. He said, "I understand why you've done it, but this is what you should have done". I should have said, "You've had your opportunities, please go and speak to the Head if you've still got any problems". It was all resolved, but I did get very stressed about it and very worked up, because I'd realised I'd done the wrong thing'* (T6). For this new teacher, the discourses of "professionalism" and "dealing with parents" have become intertwined. The head teacher uses his authority to instruct the teacher on the "correct" distribution of authority, employing a top-down form of governance which defines the roles of parents and teachers using a repertoire of procedures, rules, processes and policies.

Alex's difficulties have not gone unnoticed by the school. For four years his special needs provision follows a fixed format – a once weekly small spelling/phonics group followed by 3 homework sheets. Alex himself seeks to be actively involved in his own learning, to be an active rather than passive

participant. He devises an alternative to the prescribed, unvarying homework. His mother supports his initiative, explains his boredom to his then class teacher (not T6) and puts forward his proposition: *'He would like to draw a sort of four-thingy cartoon, and he will use his spelling words in the cartoon. He'll make it fit the spelling words'*. His teacher is open to the idea, suggesting he does it every other week. Alex invents "Fred" and he does his web cartoon as agreed every other week until Christmas, when, without warning or discussion, his mother is told that he is not allowed to do it any longer. Both Alex and his mother are excluded from participation when their active involvement is rejected without explanation. His teacher (T6) is also subject to the same regime of power. Her powerlessness further disadvantages Alex: *'When I got Alex in my class, I actually went and got some stuff about helping with his spellings and not giving him lists and stuff although I couldn't actually do too much because, obviously, the school dictates what happens'* (T6).

Summarising the defining features:

This dyad is not dissimilar to other dyads in that the parent-teacher relationship is clearly defined as a small unit which is subject to the influences of a greater unit. It is similar to other dyads in that the relationship is between a parent and teacher who access the same pedagogical knowledge base. However it is different because the mother is more conversant than the teacher with the "rules of the game", and the teacher is still very much a probationer. Within the Infant School where she works, Alex's mother is positioned as a knowledgeable employee who is trusted by the teacher to take on a high degree of responsibility within the class. This role contrasts with her position as a worried parent of a child in the Junior school where the regime is very different. She attempts to overcome the dilemmas of power relationships and multi-membership of communities by adopting a stance of apparent compliance in order to sustain a relationship which may develop into a productive partnership. Once again, it is the teacher who has the power to decide what matters and to close dialogues. This stance, which is rooted partly in unexplored assumptions, can impede negotiated meaning. The lack of opportunity for negotiating meaning can result in disconnections which will render the emergence of a 'community of practice' more difficult (but not impossible). The micro-politics within the school

demonstrate how both parent and teacher can experience powerlessness and powerfulness in different ways.

Participation, which lies at the core of Wenger's theory, is always based on situated negotiation and re-negotiation of meaning in the world. This emphasis on the relational character of knowledge and learning implies that understanding and experience are in constant interaction and are mutually constitutive. Participation in social practice focuses on the person as person-in-the-world, a member of a socialcultural community (Wenger, 1998, p.52). In the above account, both the homework strategy and special needs provision are examples of power defined in terms of conflicts of interests, advantages and disadvantages (Burbules, 1986). Alex invents Fred but his initiative to be actively involved in his own learning is rejected without explanation. When active involvement is denied, individuals, in this case the pupil, are excluded from participating. Without participation, there is no 'community of practice'.

Diane (P7/T7)

Diane is the youngest of three siblings. Shortly after birth a serious heart defect leading to heart failure is discovered. Her mother recalls multiple problems, long periods of hospitalisation, extensive medication and a complex medical history which delayed her development leaving her, currently, with '*a variety of different needs*' (P7). The school proposes that Diane, a summer born baby, should miss Reception and go straight into Year 1 with the other pupils. This is the first major decision which Diane's parents and the school have to make together and represents a critical moment in their relationship. Diane's mother acquiesces, but not without misgivings: '*I would rather not fail the child, I'd rather they kept her back*'. However when the teacher acknowledges that Diane is struggling badly the parents become more assertive and insist that Diane be held back a year. At the end of the year, Diane's parents ask to see her Individual Education Plan (IEP) which '*is just really consistent work at home, for us to carry on with her writing and spelling and Maths homework*' (P7). Unaware that this is a distorted version of the function of the IEP, but keen to help her daughter, her mother instigates her own programme at home and teaches Diane to read.

During the course of the year Diane makes several visits to the hospital. In addition to sharing all information with her daughter, Diane's mother also keeps the school regularly updated. This dialogue is reciprocated by the school: *'And we got quite a strong relationship, 'cause when anybody came in to observe Diane, we'd always feed back straight away. You know, "This is the report and this is your copy", just so she knew exactly how worried we were and what we were doing'* (T7). A decision by Diane's parents not to concur with her consultant's suggestion of a change of school is interpreted by the school as a sign of approval although it is in fact based partly on pragmatic reasons: *'We thought it best to send her where her brother was. In moving school, there's some research that that can set the child back ten months'* (P7). Concerns that undue pressure is being put upon Diane to succeed academically worry her mother, and certain aspects of practice appear problematic: *'We tried to set up quite a strong home-school link, to get Diane's Mum to work with her at home on certain concepts and re-enforce concepts. [...]. I did have to sort of say "Have you done it?" and "Here's some more", and be sort of encouraging like that. But she was very eager'* (T7). Despite having differing priorities, the parent-teacher relationship clearly works well, as Diane's mother's reflects: *'We've had a good liaison with the school, good information, they've responded very well to what we've asked and, it's been implemented'*. In fact, the relationship closely resembles the parent's expressed 'ideal': *'The ideal would be that you'd be able to identify the problems, speak with the school, good communication with the school, good area help and, obviously, that the support would be there'* (P7).

For Diane's teacher, only in her second year of teaching, the development of the relationship is beneficial and transformative, both in terms of her own developing confidence and in respect of what she has learned and will transmit to others. She describes the evolving relationship in positive terms: *'I think as I got to know her, we could be less formal and more honest really and I could speak on more general terms with her which she appreciated, and that was better 'cause I knew I was getting more across and I wasn't so worried about my words and tripping up saying things. So that came with time. It's probably helped me in terms of liaising with parents because I liaised really closely with her. I hadn't had much experience of liaising with parents. We did get on quite well personalities wise,*

so that was okay. [...] I think it's just helped me in knowing how to say things to people and how to gauge their response, to see, if they're not sure about something, how to reply. And in telling parents things, because I think initially when you start teaching you're almost, "Well, I don't wanna tell them that their child's got special needs", it's a difficult thing to say. But I think now I realise that if you don't tell them, they find out later and they're cross, because they never found out before, and you've had a wasted year. Any work you do in school doesn't work properly unless you've got the support at home' (T7).

Diane's older brother and sister are also on the SEN register. The older girl has 'an attitude problem' (P7) and frequently truants from school. Her mother, who seeks to work collaboratively with the school, finds that communication within a secondary school is more fragmented than within a primary school: 'I've been in and I was really cross and I said, "I didn't know, so I couldn't deal with it"'. Alan is the middle child in the family. His teacher was unwilling to be interviewed so what follows draws uniquely upon his mother's perspective. Alan does well at school until he is six when his parents start to become concerned. In his teacher's opinion Alan is "Really lazy, if he just applied himself, if he just got on with it, he could do it" (P7). For four years Alan is in a class which teachers find difficult to control because of the high percentage of boys with literacy/learning difficulties. The standard of Alan's work compares well with others in the class.

Alan progresses to Stage 2 of the SEN Register. Concerned that the additional help Alan is getting in school is not meeting his needs, his parents feel they need to prove that 'there was something actually wrong with him' (P7). Alan is assessed privately and shown to have a very high IQ masking 'the most severe dyslexia. Less than one per-cent of the population would show the difference between his ability and his actual performance' (P7). With such a clear and conclusive report, the parents contact the school who respond by arranging a group meeting at which the report will be discussed. Present at the meeting are the parents, the SENCo, the Borough Co-ordinator for Specific Learning Difficulties and the Headmistress. Alan's mother recalls being distraught at the terms which, she is told, must be complied with before Alan can receive additional support and teaching: 'We had to work with the school with the plan. And the plan was that he would be doing extra work every night at home. I said,

"I cannot do an hour's work with my son at the end of every night, when he's struggled all the way through school all day, I just don't think I'm able to do it. I've got three children, I have Diane. I don't think it's fair to do that to him because I'm not...I don't know how to teach him. And we said, "No." And the Borough Co-ordinator said, "Well, you're obviously not concerned". She was just such a rude lady. I didn't know her qualifications. She felt I was under stress because we had other problems in the family i.e. Diane being ill' (P7).

Alan's Year 4 class teacher has both an interest in, and experience of, working with dyslexic pupils. She provides much needed support and encouragement to both Alan and his mother. The following year however, Alan's parents are rebuffed and demoralised by a teacher who tells them *"This dyslexia stuff's a load of rubbish. There's nothing wrong with him....No big deal if he is dyslexic, I've got twenty-five others in this class"* (P7). Alan is a child whose high IQ masks his underachievement, and whose hidden handicap of dyslexia prevents him reaching his potential. Alan is not failing educationally in the obvious way that the teachers perceive his sister to be, yet his parents see him as being equally vulnerable and his learning process as fragmented. Alan's mother believes that *'the partnership of the parent and the teacher is crucial'* yet in her son's case she is powerless to effect a dialogue. What results is a less than amicable relationship: *'I think the teacher only saw me as a cross parent. [...] Whenever I went in it was because I was on the warpath for him, fighting his corner, really'* (P7).

From an early age, it becomes apparent that Alan has a great interest in, and aptitude for, the creative arts. His parents arrange for him to attend the local stage school every Saturday and two evenings a week. Here he studies jazz, ballet, tap, street dance, script work, and singing. The notion of compensation is apparent in his mother's rationale *'He excelled in something, because he wasn't excelling in anything'*. Although perhaps powerless to help their son within the educational system, this "making of another life" (which doubtless would be misconstrued by many teachers) represents a very powerful example of parental agency.

The school journey at the end of Year 6 just before the children leave primary school, offers a rare opportunity for children to be viewed as individuals. Alan's teacher, who had had such a negative view of him, comments: *"We had a lovely time with Alan, we saw him for what he was"*. These words provide little comfort to Alan's mother: *'I thought, "Well, how awful is that then?" He had a whole year of trying to show you what he is, how he is. And they never saw him for his best' (P7).*

Ironically perhaps, these parents view the future opportunities for their children with some cynicism: *'Diane is fine, she'll just go through school quite well because she gets the help she needs. Alan will do reasonably well in school but he will never fulfil his potential in a state school that haven't got the information about dyslexia and the funding. He'll only ever just scrape by'. From the parents' perspective the school have acted very positively with Diane and very negatively with Alan. One explanation for this might be that Diane's medical condition cannot be contested by the school: 'Diane fails, she doesn't make the grade. Because she had a medical condition, they seem to be able to...see it as a fact on the paper, and then they can get the help. It's a legal requirement'. Alan's learning difficulties however, are open to alternative interpretations: 'I think I was seen as a threat. We instigated to find out about the dyslexia. I think if they'd have discovered he'd been dyslexic, it would have been a different ball game' (P7).*

Summarising the defining features:

This mother's articulation of the partnership she seeks with each of her children's teachers closely resembles a model akin to a 'community of practice'. Many of Wenger's defining characteristics are present in the partnership which supports Diane. A mutual relationship is sustained even though potential conflicts arise due to divergent perspectives about priorities and understandings of "what matters". There are shared ways of doing things, a rapid flow of information and the rapid setting up of problems which need to be discussed are a continuous part of an ongoing process. The three dimensions of a 'community of practice', the mutual engagement, the negotiated enterprise and the sharing of a repertoire of accumulated resources are all present. The 3-way dissemination of

information, indicative of the good communication sought and valued by many participants in this study, is a key dimension to the relative success of the parent-teacher partnership which is grounded in the kind of mutual respect which allows for all voices to be heard. For Diane's teacher, there are clear indications that the benefits to be accrued from a 'community of practice' are realised as she acknowledges the beneficial and transformative effect of the partnership both in terms of her own developing confidence and in respect of what she has learned and will transmit to others.

Both children attend the same school and the concern which motivates the mother's agency is the same for each of her offspring. The Head teacher was happy for my interview with Diane's teacher to take place because this was considered a positive example of "working collaboratively with parents". I was not, however, able to interview Alan's teacher. From his mother's account, none of the defining features of partnership are present when she attempts to address her son's needs. The significant factor which explains her different relationships to the teachers and the school arises from a lack of consensus as to whether Alan indeed has the kind of educational difficulties which have been identified by an independent educational psychologist. It seems as though, paradoxically, his hidden disability is both disputed and acknowledged. The very fact that some specialist provision will be considered suggests an acknowledgement that Alan has educational needs which are not being met. However, provision which is conditional upon a family's compliance with stringent terms and conditions might suggest that an alternative agenda is at play. For Alan's family, the non-negotiable terms are effectively impossible for them to meet. In order to compensate for the perceived shortfall in his education within school, his parents elect to follow an alternative curriculum. Alan thrives on the "other life" which he attends outside of school hours.

This account of one mother's attempts to secure appropriate provision for all of her children introduces new insight into how 'communities of practice' may or may not emerge, and under which conditions they are sustainable. In Diane's case, an incontestable medical diagnosis provides the foundations for working in partnership. In Alan's case, the lack of consensus as to his problems compromises the potential space for negotiating meanings. Without this initial

consensus, the tone is set for less than amicable relationships. The educational professionals involved construct different identities for this parent according to whether they deem her parental agency to be appropriate or inappropriate. Both children have the same mother and are in the same school. The difference in attitude towards the mother appears to be a response to what teachers perceive as the “deserving” and “undeserving” pupil. This positioning of the mother in different ways to the teachers and the school is a key dynamic which impacts upon relationships, both maximising and minimising the potential emergence of a ‘community of practice’.

Julia (P8/T8)

Julia is dyspraxic and undergoing an assessment for a Statement of Special Educational Needs. When she was seven months old, her father's employment necessitated a long sojourn overseas. Removed from the watchful eyes of her grandmother, a teacher, and with no support from the wider family, Julia was looked after by a maid. On returning to England Julia attends a local playgroup in a church hall where she is happy but talks little. She moves to a five-day-a-week nursery where the teacher, who has twenty years of experience, comments on Julia being ‘*different*’ to other children and recommends a move to a PNEU¹⁹ school. However, within just two weeks at the new school, Julia's teacher is saying “*She's just completely different from everybody else. She's very well behaved, she's lovely but she can't do this and she can't do that*” (P8). When academic problems become apparent the head teacher initially appears supportive, recommending different professionals, and offering additional help from an assistant, all at additional cost. After several meetings to discuss the best way of supporting Julia the PNEU then present a list of reasons why Julia is not coping and express their concern that she will not cope in Year 1. Julia's

¹⁹ Parents National Education Union Schools (PNEU) follow the philosophical ideology of Charlotte Mason, a British educator who developed a Philosophy of Education designed for homes, private schools, and home-schooling. The Charlotte Mason approach is based on the core subjects and incorporates the fine arts. Children are trained to narrate (tell back) what they have learned so that the emphasis is placed on what they know rather than what they do not know. Mason's teaching fell out of popular use in the late 1930s, but a small number of original PNEU schools continue to this day. In the last decade there has been a resurgence of interest particularly amongst home schoolers with new PNEU-type private schools opening.

mother understanding is that *'that they didn't want Julia anymore'*.²⁰ Julia is seen by an educational psychologist whose advice, to remove Julia from the PNEU and to send her instead to a state school, is followed by the parents.

The family meet her new Headmaster and class teacher who are *'just completely unfazed. Just absolutely fine, "We deal with this all the time; not a problem. All the children are individual"'* (P8). Within a couple of weeks of starting Julia is placed on Stage 3 of the Code of Practice and the SENCo outlines the provision the school will make for her. Although happy with the approach of the new school Julia's mother continues to independently explore other avenues, employing a private occupational therapist, and subsequently enrolling both Julia and her brother on a programme offered by a private clinic.

For this mother, the ideal model parent-teacher partnership *'would be supplementing or supporting'* what her child does in school. Although this is what she seeks, the establishment of a good working relationship between class teacher and parent falters at the very outset when the mother requests extra reading books. This is rejected by the class teacher whose response is *"Oh no, I can't do that otherwise every child will want it"* (P8)²¹. This critical incident of denied mutuality leads Julia's mother to choose to liaise with the SENCo rather than the class teacher. She rationalises her actions, saying: *'I do see the relationship more with the SENCo than with the classroom teacher, because obviously the classroom teacher has a myriad of different personalities and needs to deal with. [...] A classroom teacher is too busy to do individual things with the children'* (P8). In my interview with her, Julia's teacher did not refer to the request for additional reading books which holds such significance for the mother.

Julia's teacher notes that Julia is making pleasing progress which she attributes, possibly inaccurately, to the programme that Julia is following out of school: *'*

²⁰ This is the third account of young children with difficulties being *'asked to leave'* private schools. The parents of both Ian and Henry (in Study 1) believed, as did Julia's mother that their child was seen *'as a child they couldn't teach and they didn't want'*. In Henry's case, the chain of events which followed, including further exclusions, led ultimately to his total exclusion from school aged 14.

²¹ Surprisingly perhaps, this is not an uncommon response by teachers to parental requests for additional reading books in order to help their children at home.

think that must be what, because I'm not doing anything different. Julia's teacher has little time to further her knowledge of dyspraxia: *'I haven't actually had a full-on chat with Julia's mum, but I know that she did give last year's teacher a lot of information on dyspraxia which is in her file. And if I wanted it, I could just go and take it but I haven't yet, no time but...yeah'* (T8). She is ignorant both of the contents of the programme that Julia is following, and the controversy surrounding it: *'The SENCo gave me the video and I didn't get round to watching it'* (T8). There is, nevertheless, a strong degree of consensus with the general approach adopted by Julia's mother: *'I don't think she tries to push her, she helps her'* (T8).

Summarising the defining features:

This teacher, unlike some other teachers in the study, is not disparaging or disapproving of alternative strategies or external programmes unless it interferes with school attendance, has a negative effect or increases her workload.

Julia's mother believes that: *'Parents must be pro-active, but then not all parents are. Some parents can't cope, they don't have the strategies for coping'*. She, like other parents, has many decisions to make, but unlike others, she has the advantage of an abundance of resources which maximise her strategies for coping. Julia's mother possesses considerable and appropriate economic, social and cultural capital. She is a school governor, is in a financial position to be able to choose *'to go private'*, and is able to harness additional resources from the wider family, in particular, the knowledge, experience, and material resources offered by her mother-in-law, who has been a teacher for 40 years.

Some teachers resent what could be perceived as the use of advantage, or what might alternatively be viewed as a representation of "good" parenting, to influence educational success. However in the relationship between Julia's mother and teacher there appears to be an unvoiced and subtly disguised consensus about their practices. It seems that the advantages perceived as accrued by parent, teacher and pupil dissolve any undermining of the class teacher's decision-making in the classroom. Parent and teacher maintain a virtual "non-relationship" with each other. It is therefore not surprising that both

parent and teacher find it difficult to articulate their relationship and to relate it to their respective 'ideal models'.

Conor (P9/T9)

11-year-old Conor has experienced difficulties throughout his school life. These have been variously attributed by his teachers to the wide range of "normal" development, being a boy and a summer birth. The family's main source of advice has been Conor's aunt who is '*reasonably clued-up in child development issues*' (P9). However Conor's behaviour at home begins to change and he becomes increasingly aggressive, difficult, naughty and negative. This is the trigger point for the parents to seek further advice from the family doctor. At this point, '*help really kicked in*' (P9).

Conor's mother seeks a better understanding of the full nature of his son's difficulties: '*We started thinking there is a bit more to this rather than him just having difficulty with handwriting. [...] You have lots of things in your head and you've got concerns and spotted things and they don't quite add up, and then suddenly you see something and you think "Yes". It's not that it's a hundred percent but that's as close as you're ever gonna get to a description of another child which could be mine*' (P9). An article in a newspaper initially provides her with corroborating information. A visit to the doctor gives her confidence and leads to an action plan. Finally, an informative video offers suggestions of ways she can help Conor and allows her to put his difficulties into perspective.

The family doctor has two sons who, like Conor, are dyspraxic. In him, she finds '*a soul-mate, who could understand what I was talking about, and the difficulties and frustrations and so on*' (P9). He refers Conor to the Child Development Centre and suggests occupational therapy. His advice to Conor's mother is to: '*specifically go back in and talk to the school and see if we could bring the two sides together*'. Conor's mother is keen for the school '*to have an awareness...so that we can work on it together*'. By Year 4 there are clear indications that this is beginning to happen. The SENCo became more involved, and there are signs that information is beginning to be exchanged, albeit in a limited fashion: '*I'm not sure...how much information was then being moved*

around inside the school, I don't think much was. I think there was, sort of parallel things happening, rather than crossover' (P9).

Conor's mother continues her quest for more information: *'I did a bit of hunting around because none of the medical people and occupational therapists would put, I don't want to say label, none of them would give it a name "He had difficulties, he had co-ordination difficulties". But the more I was reading, I would throw in the word "dyspraxia" every so often, and "dyspraxia type" or "dyspraxia symptoms", or close to or aligned to, it's as close as anyone would come. But that didn't matter to me, I wanted the strategies. I wanted to know how to help, so yes I was looking at the Internet a little bit and the Dyspraxia Association/Foundation /Trust. We joined them and got some stuff from them and read quite a lot of their stuff' (P9).* As she becomes more informed so her confidence grows. By the time that Conor is in Year 5, she feels ready to work more collaboratively with the school. This is an objective which is supported by the SENCo and an enthusiastic form teacher. The reciprocal exchange of information together with the time and effort put in by Conor's mother, are valued and recognised by the school: *'She, personally herself, had done an awful lot of research and obviously had grave concerns about Conor, and then went off and got occupational and physiotherapists involved' (T9).*

Conor's mother is a parent-governor at the school. At first she attributes her "progress/success" to personal and social qualities: *'Probably coloured by the fact that I've had some education, I'm reasonably articulate. I've got the confidence to go in and ask'.* Then, upon further reflection, she adds: *'On the other hand it's an open school which I feel...would welcome any other parent going in. But it's doubly wrong then to rely on the parents being the one with the initiative. Okay, I knew something wasn't right and did make some effort to find out and having got some information took it to the next stage. Not all parents would have the confidence to do that [...]. I was lucky in that it was a school I was familiar with. I knew all, how they were doing things' (P9).* Year 4 was not a particularly successful year for Conor: *'I don't feel he had a particularly good form teacher that year. She was newly qualified, she had a big class. It was a year of marking time. She was less interventionist, she was new, I didn't know her. [...]* The teachers that he had in Years 5 and 6...*I knew them before he had them and*

got on well with them' (P9). "Knowing" and "liking" suggest the social capital inherent in the network of relationships which she has established as a school governor. Ambivalence, however, pervades her reflections: *'I think if (my being a governor) affected a relationship it was with the SENCo. The SENCo and I hadn't ever had a particularly good relationship. I mean, it was professional and so on'*. Here she pauses for a long time before continuing: *'In retrospect I might have been quite...she might have found me quite difficult. And if I was a governor that may well have made that a more formal relationship than it might otherwise have... we might have sorted it out earlier'*. Conor's mother is clearly uncertain as to whether being a governor is advantageous or disadvantageous for a parent of a child with SEN. Conor's class teacher offers an alternative version: *'I suppose I'd always known his mum because of obviously her role within the school. So I always had a good relationship with his mum, and perhaps that helped when he was in my class because she knew me and I knew her. It helped us work together because we were...already on good terms I suppose'* (T9).

When Conor is in Year 6, a new and inexperienced SENCo replaces the previous SENCo. By this time, Conor's mother had *'then had the two years worth of very good, very involved classroom teachers. So, as I said on the form, the relationship with the SENCo was a formality, through no fault of hers, it was because the teachers were involved and were doing the types of things which in some other instances the SENCo might have done'* (P9). Conor's mother is appreciative of initiatives taken by his class teacher which enable him to perform to his ability in the SATs, ensuring *'that some of his true potential could show through in results' which are 'a fair reflection of his work'*. Conor clearly benefits from the school's approach: *'Towards the end of (primary school) he was doing well. He had gained a lot of confidence in his own environment. [...] He does get frustrated, but he is now starting to talk about it a bit, he won't just bottle it up'*. Conor's confidence is also improved by the acquisition of a laptop in his last two terms at primary school. His teacher explains the importance of keyboarding for Conor's self-esteem: *'It was another means of him recording his work, without him getting frustrated at the final copy which looked as if he was a child of about three or four. [...] Once we brought in the means whereby he could type his work*

or someone would scribe for him, that helped him to develop intellectually as well as socially.

For Conor a laptop has the same importance as spectacles for someone with a sight problem. Yet the laptop is not as easily acquired. The borough initially refuses the request on the grounds that his keying skills would be at the same level as his writing skills, and he does not have a Statement of Special Educational Needs. A concerted approach overcomes the borough's contradictions and policies resulting in the much-needed laptop. Conor's teacher believes that his mother is the driving force behind the initiative: *'I think it was through her determination that finally got all of this in motion'*. Her determination however has to be viewed alongside other key factors, namely the joint enterprise and emergent knowledgeability which characterises the partnership: *'We worked together very closely. We had meetings with the occupational therapists, it was really through that meeting with all of us, with the LSA, myself, Conor's mother and obviously getting Conor's views as well, that we were able really to push for this laptop'* (T9). An occupational therapist becomes part of the team and designs a programme for Conor. This includes sessions in the hydro-pool which are scheduled to fit in with Conor's mother's work commitments: *'She's been fantastic, and a great listener too. It was somebody who was ...not just sympathetic, but used her initiative and had ideas and an understanding'* (P9). His teacher refers to the groundwork which had taken place prior to Conor coming into her class and which gives her *'an awful lot of knowledge. I was very much aware of other people's concerns. An awful lot of things had been done for Conor prior to him coming into my class. Occupational therapists were involved with him, physiotherapists were involved with him. He had been assessed by the borough for dyslexia as well as looking at his motor-control problems'* (T9).

6 of the 32 children in Conor's class are on the Special Needs Register. Conor though has *'profound'* needs that are qualitatively different from the other children. Year 6 operates a group system which allows one part-time teacher and two full-time teachers to share the timetable. Managing the class is made easier by this system however it is the fund of available and communal information which is the most instrumental in providing for Conor's needs. Conor's mother's contribution, for example: *'Enhanced our understanding rather*

than changed our opinion. I think everybody was very concerned and not able to pinpoint exactly his difficulties and why he had these difficulties. It was being able to channel the help so that he could get exactly what he needed' (T9).

This sharing of repertoires, information and theories and the mutual engagement of all those involved in working with Conor characterise a partnership whose influence spreads to include all who come into contact with the pupil: *'Not just the teachers, his peers as well, and other people within the school because obviously his motor control didn't (only) affect him in the classroom but also doing physical activity as well. It was nice that they had an understanding' (T9).* Explaining Conor's difficulties to his peers prevents him from becoming 'ostracised' whilst also allowing the other children to participate in a supportive project. His peer group are actively encouraged to participate in each other's learning and to experience engagement as a meaningful and enabling enterprise. Within the classroom, pupils identified as being "needy" in specific areas receive the support of other pupils with identified strengths in the same area. In this way, the classroom becomes a site of individual and collective learning which contributes to a collective production of meaning: *'Everybody in a class knows where they fit in that classroom hierarchy, but I think children themselves are very supportive of their friends. And I think children often like to get help from their peers rather from adults. I've got a few buddy systems as well in my class for children who've got terrible organisational skills. You say "Such-and-such is staying with you today and have you got your file sorted?" and they see it as a huge responsibility helping one another' (T9).*

Conor, his parents and teacher work as part of a team maintaining constant communication with each other: *'I think it was very much a partnership and we kept each other informed. Conor was responsible for coming up to me on a Friday and waving his homework diary. That became a link book between Mum and Dad and myself and Conor as well. I think we were fighting for his cause. Yeah, we very much were working together, and I think Conor thought that as well' (T9).* Clearly, within this school as within others, not all parents and teachers work so collaboratively together. Not all parents are able to activate the same kinds of social and cultural capital: *'On the whole, we've got supportive parents who do genuinely care about their children and want their children to*

make progress. [...] We are lucky on parents evening, ninety percent of cases both parents attend. And if parents are separated, often there are a couple of parents who can have separate appointments which I think is great. I think it shouldn't be down solely to the mother'. Conor's teacher suggests that: 'Some parents unfortunately see it very much as our job, rather than their job as well. I think due to the fact that a lot of parents are both working now due to financial constraints. I think the will's there, the wish, the desire's there, but it doesn't actually happen in practice'. As a teacher, actively encouraging the children to coerce their parents' participation is part of her practice: 'I plead with the children "Go home, nag your parents, play with them, get them to do this. Miss Smith says that we have to do this". It's a three-way partnership, rather than a two-way partnership. I think the pupils themselves can play such a major part to show off their successes, grab their parents, make their parents sit down for five minutes "Look what I've achieved today" or "Would you help me with this"' (T9).

For Conor's teacher, partnership involves a commitment to participating in a learning culture where all contributions are equally valued: *'I think it's just having an open communication line. Everybody's got to be very honest and included'. Parental contributions are valued: 'I think parents have got a very important part to play. Strategies that have been proven to work in the classroom can filter through to home and vice versa. Parents tend to be very honest, and obviously if they have done some research and got stuff off the Internet or have got some leaflets, they will be keen to share those and just say "Perhaps you'd like to read them". And equally we do as well'. Equally valued is the pupil's contribution: 'I think the child should very much be part of any discussions as well, to get their feelings and their experiences. Sometimes it's very easy to assume what we think is best for the child without actually consulting the child and finding out what they find difficult, why they find it difficult and what they would like us to do to help them'. Contributions from other sources are also important because: 'As a teacher you tend to wear lots of different hats and not necessarily be a master of any of them. I think obviously anybody who is a specialist in a particular field, their information is incredibly useful. I think it's just taking everything on board really, and using everything. Using the good bits and bits that perhaps you don't agree with'. However the involvement of diverse agencies is not unproblematic*

and can prove challenging: *'Sometimes dealing with children with special needs can be a battle because of other constraints. [...] It's down to special needs co-ordinators to prioritise which children they feel are the greatest priority. It also depends on educational psychologists' allocated hours and the use of outside agencies. So you get this help in place, and then it all seems to be helping and then it all collapses'* (T9).

Conor's mother believes that parents need to sensitively take the initiative should an accumulated bank of knowledge and experience not be available in the school. Parents, in her view, expect schools to be pro-active, to either possess expertise/ knowledge or information about learning difficulties, or be able to offer suggestions for making this accessible to parents. Parents need to: *'Make sure there's a decent partnership with the school. They may well have to provide a lot of information for the school and they need to try and keep that as a constructive relationship'*. This constructive partnership: *'Has to be a partnership where either can say...where there's mutual support and there's an exchange of information, and both are open to ideas and both are approachable. A partnership, I suspect, works best where both are reasonably informed, or are finding out together. [...] So I think in a partnership like that, the parent is expecting the school to be informed and to be educated and to be proactive in giving information. I think part of that partnership is that the parents expect the school to be informed, rightly or wrongly'* (P9).

Summarising the defining features:

Wenger writes that:

Learning is the engine of practice, and practice is the history of learning. As a consequence, communities of practice have life cycles that reflect such a process. They come together, they develop, they evolve, they disperse, according to the timing, the logic, the rhythms, and the social energy of their learning. Thus, unlike more formal types of organisational structures, it is not so clear where they begin and end (Wenger, 1998, p.96).

Nevertheless, it is possible in this account to chart the emergence and evolution of a 'community of practice' which supports 11 year old Conor through his last years in primary school. The account begins by illuminating again how parents who have unresolved concerns about their children seek to become better

informed and more involved in their child's education. This invokes a process which can be demanding for teachers. Just how teachers and parents develop in such circumstances is a dimension of their practice, creating new opportunities for mutual engagement:

Our experience and our membership inform each other, lull each other, transform each other. We create ways of participating in a practice in the very process of contributing to making the practice what it is (Wenger, 1998, p.96).

The process of mutual engagement requires that each participant makes an investment in negotiating the relationship. Because this investment is so closely linked to defining, transforming and sustaining identities it can, as has already been seen in previous accounts, be destabilizing, leading to modified forms of participation and discontinuities between participants. For relationships between parents and teachers to become partnerships akin to Wenger's idealised notion of a 'community of practice', a clear, purposeful and meaningful context is required alongside mutual respect and reciprocity in the co-construction of knowledge. This account illustrates how social contexts can be navigated and negotiated, and how the dynamics of joint negotiation can incorporate different understandings of learning and participation.

Conor's mother presents as organised, informed, concerned and focused. She is able to draw upon her considerable and appropriate resources of social and cultural capital to develop a close relationship with her son's teacher and a clear relationship with the school. As such, she comes across as a "good" parent who is instrumental in the creation of a partnership which demonstrates many, if not all, of the characteristics of Wenger's ideal 'community of practice'. Conor's mother becomes the lynch pin in the forming and sustaining of a network which involves Conor, his G.P who is instrumental in laying the foundations for the parental pro-active contribution to the project, his family, class teacher, the SENCo, and a range of therapists. All become involved in a negotiated enterprise and a process of learning in which the sharing of goals, resources and practices contribute to the mutual goal of supporting Conor. This account highlights two interesting factors which can impact upon the emergence of effective partnerships. The first is the ambiguous mis-match of power

relationships which can characterise relationships between the parent-governor and teacher. The second relates to the way in which some agencies, for example, educational psychologists or those holding managerial positions, are viewed by some class teachers as having a casual but legitimate access to their practice within a complex social landscape of shared practice, boundaries, and peripheries.

In accordance with her beliefs as to the roles and responsibilities of a parent, Conor's mother becomes the initiator and broker who brings together a network of communication and sustains interrelated forms of participation. This network, because it transcends both geographical and organisational boundaries, has the potential to negotiate barriers and overcome obstacles. The acquisition of the lap-top, for example, demonstrates how the collective construction of a local practice can, as in this instance, provide resolutions to institutionally generated barriers and conflicts (Wenger, 1998, p.46). This is a version of partnership which goes beyond, and is qualitatively different from, partnership founded upon simple compliance which more often than not results in a restricted version of parental involvement. For those involved in accumulating a common store of knowledge, the process is both transformative and developmental. For a 'community of practice' to develop, there has to be a site of knowledge production and shared practice where theories and ways of understanding can be developed, negotiated and shared as part of a participatory knowledge construction process.

Conor's teacher is part of the network which, by all accounts, is effective in supporting Conor. Her words indicate her preference for the kind of practice where the acquisition and creation of knowledge is both based upon and produces shared points of reference, repertoires, and learning grounded in an understanding of the value of shared learning. Importantly, she values pupils as active and equally participating subjects. What Windschitl refers to as the 'local knowledge of diverse learners' replaces the authoritative voice of teachers. Instead, tools, information resources and dialogue are used to construct knowledge collectively (Windschitl, 2002, p.158), underpinned by a mutual respect. For this teacher, teaching and learning become productive enterprises when divergent meanings, ambiguities and contradictions are examined and alternative perspectives and theories negotiated. Because she understands the nature of

knowledge to be inherently partial, articulation, which involves reflection and an exchange of ideas, is always necessary.

In the above account, parent and teacher are positioned as learners working together to construct and participate in a joint project. Their practice becomes a source of coherence arising from a process of individual and collective learning in which they become part of a whole through mutual engagement and enabling strategies. Participation in a 'community of practice' is a transformative process, affecting learning, meaning-making, knowledge and identity. It is a site where knowledge becomes an accumulated commodity and competence is acquired, shared and extended. The result is combinations of different kinds of knowledgeabilities which inform each other. The rewards for Conor, the subject and object of this partnership, are evident.

Michael (P10/T10)

Both Michael and his older sister Melanie show signs of having educational difficulties from their early days at school. Both are assessed privately in response to the school's position: *'We didn't have a hope in Hell's chance of getting any help through the school'* (P10). Michael's assessment reveals co-morbid problems of attention deficit disorder (ADD), dyslexia and behavioural problems. Severe chronic asthma and epilepsy necessitate his frequent hospitalisation. His medications cause severe migraines, black moods and mood swings. This complex picture allows his school to argue that they are unable to differentiate between the side affects of his medication and his cognitive ability. They advise against pursuing the Statementing process telling his mother: *'I'd be wasting the school's time, my time and the taxpayer's money if I went ahead with it'*. This is met with the sharp riposte: *'I'll go straight to the borough above your heads if you won't do this'* (P10).

The children's mother arranges for them to have sessions of specialist tuition at the Dyslexia Institute who also offer additional information and support. For a single parent working full time to support the family, options are limited: *'I had to, by myself, earn money for the dyslexic things, plus rent, plus everything else'*. A bursary from the Institute only covers half of the costs of the lessons, and working is the only option: *'When I got divorced I had to find a job because of*

Michael's illness that would allow me flexibility. There were a lot of people that wouldn't look after him because he had severe epilepsy [...]. I had to do most of the childcare myself as well as work supposedly full-time' (P10).

The school is fully aware of the home circumstances and the mother's situation. They use this information to hinder rather than help her efforts: *'They played very heavily on the fact that the kids were not living a normal lifestyle, therefore the fact that they were not coping with the reading wasn't because they were dyslexic, but because I was a single parent with very little time, lots of jobs to do and not giving them enough attention. [...] They also knew that the background to my divorce was a very violent one and we'd had to move from safe-house to safe-house roughly every six months' (P10).*

Michael is a child for whom: *'There are facts and there are lies and the two don't come anywhere near each other. So if you are six and you ask him a question or you are sixty he will give you a straight answer. He won't pad it out or spare your feelings at all' (P10).* The following is an example of the kind of "upfrontness" that some teachers find difficult to cope with: *'When he was in the nursery they asked him to make a Fathers Day card and he said, "No, I don't have a father". And they said "Of course you have a father, everybody has a father". And he said "Well I don't. So I'm not making one." So they said, "You will make one. He said "I won't. My Dad was a drug addict that beat up my Mum and he's gone and I don't know who he is and I don't know where he is and I'm not making a card". So they said, "Fine, make one for your Granddad then". And he said "Is it Granddad's Day? No. No it's not, it's Fathers Day". So he was the only child that came out with no card. And the school could not get their head round this attitude of his, that if he thought something was wrong or right he just said it' (P10).*

In the classroom Michael has no difficulty answering questions. However, it is not long before he realises that he has a problem with reading. He resorts to avoidance strategies because getting into trouble and subsequently being removed from the class is his preferred option to reading out loud. A special needs teacher pronounces that Michael: *'Shouldn't be in a mainstream school with everybody else, he should be in a special school, because he was mentally*

disturbed' (M10). On the school's insistence that he has a severe mental problem rather than dyslexia, Michael spends an hour and a half with a psychiatrist. At the end of the session his mother is told: *"The only problem he has is control of his gob"*. The psychiatrist is confident that: *'Life will teach him how to control his views. He's blunter than most people actually feel comfortable with'* (P10).

Michael continues with his lessons at the Dyslexia Institute whilst the gulf between the family and school widens. He becomes increasingly frustrated by the attitude of his teachers: *'If there was ever anything that went wrong in class he was immediately blamed. They said that he was disruptive. They were out to prove that I was stupid and that the school weren't at fault at all'* (P10). Attempts to get help are continually thwarted by the school who, according to Michael's mother: *'regarded having a child going through the Statement as almost a failure of theirs'*. The undesirability of an apparently unresolvable and confrontational situation leads to a decision to remove both children from the school.

Michael's mother remarries and sorting out the children's educational difficulties becomes the joint priority. The children start to attend a private school which has a dyslexic unit attached. For two years all progresses smoothly until their stepfather has a heart attack and the expense of private education becomes a luxury that can no longer be afforded. However, by now, both children have made substantial progress. Their parents visit several local state schools before deciding upon a school whose headmaster has personal experience of having a child with difficulties: *'He said he knows what it's like to fight, he's been there. He told us this at the interview and he said "It isn't a problem"'*(P10). The headmaster makes a *'huge difference'*, rendering the Statementing process for both children rapid and uncomplicated. This contrasts with the stance taken by the first school who: *'were trying all the time to offload all his problems onto a medical problem, trying to take no responsibility at all for the fact that the dyslexia could be there and they needed to help him too'*. It was not surprising therefore that information offered to the first school was negatively received: *'It was almost like we were intruding on their area and that we were trying to tell them how to do their job. They didn't welcome what they felt was interference into the way they taught the children'* (P10).

Michael benefits from having a teacher in Year 5 (T10) *'who put that little bit of extra, who views each child as an individual'* (P10). Year 6 is a regressive year for Michael because he has a teacher who, *'basically...didn't really want to know. She tried her best to prove that Michael didn't really have any learning difficulties, that he was just a disruptive child'* (P10). Michael dislikes this teacher and does not want to go into her class. A balance is only maintained by a specialist teacher, who takes him out of lessons, and the Headmaster himself who takes Michael under his wing and gives him extra help. This unspoken yet negotiated solution prevents Michael from slipping backwards. His SATs results (Science 5, Maths 4, English 3) confound the predictions of those teachers who believed him to be severely mentally handicapped rather than dyslexic: *'They told me, that the highest I could hope for ever in his life was a level two at Science and Maths and a level one, maximum, in English'* (P10).

Comment and criticism, whether made explicitly or otherwise, is not solely within the domain of parents. Michael's Year 5 teacher reflects upon the performance of Michael's former teacher who was isolated and inexperienced: *'I thought initially Michael would be harder work than he was, because he had a very bad year the year before. [...] All the boys in that class had had a horrific year, absolutely horrific. They were appalling with the teacher they had. She's a newly qualified teacher, I don't think she taught again. [...] And not to be unprofessional but I don't think she really had the experience to be able to deal with a class like that. [...] Obviously, he was a behavioural problem, but that wasn't the issue, you can get to grips with the nitty-gritty of what's going on with that child. Obviously, I can't comment on why or whatever but she couldn't do that. She didn't really have much help to be honest with you...'* (T10).

Michael's Year 5 teacher *'spent time on her own with him, so that she clicked into his personality, and the way that he needed to be spoken to'* (P10). She becomes increasingly aware of Michael's rigid adherence to a policy of fairness and his positive response to praise. She uses this awareness to organise *'a system for him where he was constantly given responsibility'* (P10). Michael flourishes with this teacher. The school play illustrates how teachers vary in their sensitivity and awareness of children's needs. In the Year 5 school play, Michael is given *'a big, showy part'* (M10). To minimise any potential failure his teacher

(T10) gives him his script early so he has the time to work on it at home. This provides a stark contrast to the insensitive practice of his next teacher who *'expected him to read in front of the whole class a script that he'd never seen before, off an overhead projector. When he couldn't do this, they didn't give him a part in the school play'* (P10).

Michael's progress, or otherwise, is the determining factor which colours his mother's relationships with the teachers: *'There are some that have absolutely no concept of the problem Michael has, or what he's had to face, and really don't care. All they want is a nice, beautiful, quiet class, with no child to have to give special attention to. They really aren't interested in what you have to say to them. There are other teachers who view each child as an individual'. She comments upon a lack of continuity and liaison between some teachers who 'seem to feel that talking to each other is an interference'* (P10). Not all teachers find previous reports, or talking to each other, either suffices or particularly helpful, as his teacher explains: *'He came to me with a reputation as being quite a naughty boy. [...]. You can't help but take that in, but I do like to judge children on what I find them like not what I've heard about them. [...] I'll talk to the teacher from last year, although I like to do that in a very sort of basic way, because I like to find out about children for myself'* (T10). She recalls her first meeting with Michael and the 'real look on his face' which suggests 'a slightly bad attitude'. Together however, they are able to develop a good, productive relationship: *'He was hard work, but very pleasurable hard work. I got a lot out of him'* (T10).

Michael's mother would like to see a *'complete shake-up...in attitude'*, a realignment of the way children with difficulties are positioned as "problem" children within a discourse which only understands success in terms of quantifiable exam results: *'They're not an innocent...child who just needs a helping hand to get where they've got to go. They're a child that is giving that teacher a problem, because it means extra work, extra time, extra money. They see that child as taking money and time off other children. [...] Teachers by nature like children that can achieve because then the school record looks good, et cetera, et cetera'*.

Of the 28 children in Michael's class, 18 are on the Special Needs Register. Michael's behavioural difficulties become most pronounced when work is not differentiated to meet his needs and abilities: *'If you gave him something...that was too easy, it was offensive to him, obviously. If you gave him something that was too hard, he'd go off in a strop. But, we got there'* (T10). "Getting there" is achieved by adopting a pragmatic approach: *'I didn't used to be too prescriptive with his reading, I used to like to give him books that I had read when I was a kid and he loved reading things like that'* (T10). Pragmatism accords with his mother's approach: *'The teachers wanted to stop him doing PE and climbing ropes. I said to them that any child could fall from the top of a rope. [...] I said "If you feel worried, stick an extra mat under there"'* (P10). Michael's mother's approach to problem solving is to become better informed: *'My theory in life has always been that fear is conquered by knowledge, therefore the more you know about something, the less fearful it is. Yes, the more you read, the more you know, the more facts you arm yourself with, the less fearful a condition is'*. She is determined to avoid making Michael "different": *'My aim was to make him normal, he'd have to live his life round the epilepsy, not stop his life because of the epilepsy'*. Getting teachers and schools to share her philosophy is not always easy: *'To me, it wasn't a problem. To them, it was this huge barrier, to have this child'* (P10).

Michael's mother suggests a chance element is instrumental in her decision-making: *'It has just been luck all the way down the line that someone, somewhere, has given me the piece of information I needed'*. Lady luck, however, seems a less likely explanation in the light of her personal philosophy: *'It's your job as a parent. I do have a faith, a religion. I believe that you are given children as a gift, if you like. They're not my children as such, they are given to me with a job to do, and that job is to make them as independent as possible, and to give them the best life that they can achieve, not to be stuck to my apron strings. It's my job to make sure they get the best out of life that they can achieve. Now if that means that Michael ends up being a dustman, that's great, if that's what he wants to be. But for me, it is my job to make sure he can have a choice. If he wants to be a barrister then he can do that if he wants. If he has*

the qualifications to be a barrister and chooses to be a gardener, that's his choice. I don't have ambition for them, apart from to give them choice' (P10).

Michael's mother recognises that she is a 'forceful' and 'domineering' person who is always ready to fight to achieve her objectives for her children: *'Don't listen to what the authorities tell you; read, get your own information and then fight for what you know your child can do or for what is right for your child. No one will actually help you unless you fight for it. And you have to fight every inch of the way and every time they put a block in your way, you have to fight through it, or over it or round it. And if you don't, your child's gonna be left on a heap. Mine are lucky that they've actually managed to get the help they need, but it's only through fighting and through bucking the system the whole way that it's managed to get there' (P10).*

Michael's teacher also has to fight to be heard: *'Other teachers would obviously not be nasty about a child but would say things like "Oh that person", "That boy", or "That girl" or whatever, and I'd be like "No but they're not like that". It was hard for me to get across how well behaved they were for me as a class' (T10).* The 'regimes of truth' to which she is subjected muddy the waters of the relationship she tries to sustain with parents: *'I think (the educational psychologist we have now) is the only educational psychologist I've met that is worth the paper his doctorate is written on. I have never met an educational psychologist that does anything. To give you an example of this, the educational psychologist (before the current one) who dealt with Michael she said to me, after she'd assessed Michael, "Have you ever thought about reading with Michael?" And I looked at her and I went "Hey no, I never thought about that one!" You know, "I'll try that next", and I was actually offended and then she said, "Have you thought about giving him a book that's his ability?" I was honestly nearly banging my head against the desk. And of course, I couldn't say this to Michael's mother because this is a professional person who's coming in and trying to help Michael. And I thought "Yeah, you might as well not even bother girl, I've got more information about him in my little finger than you've done in your whole...meetings with him" (T10).*

This teacher has a very clear picture of the relationship she seeks to have with parents: *'I like my parents to come into the classroom and help. But I have to say I have come across parents who've been more than wanting to help, they've actually wanted to come in and change what you've done. If I'm doing something wrong then there are things within the school system to tell me I'm doing those things wrong. I know it's a parent's right to obviously help their child as much as they can. But there are ways that you can help your teacher to help your child. One of them is not to come in and say "You are a crap teacher". My ideal parent-partnership would be someone who I can talk to if I've got a problem with the child. They can talk to me if they've got a problem with something like homework, but that they're not gonna rant and rave and come in and really have a good slagging off'* (T10). Establishing good parent-teacher relationships demands a high degree of reciprocity, flexibility and common sense. Both partners need: *'to build that relationship if they can and talk as often as is necessary to do that. I think the parent and teacher both need to make themselves available for...meetings with each other. Obviously, with time constraints and things like that, it's quite hard to do that sometimes though isn't it? Parents work full-time, but it's very important isn't it? I have stayed till nine-thirty before so a parent could come and meet me after work here. I don't mind being accommodating as long as I feel like the parent is also being accommodating'* (T10).

Summarising the defining features:

Several factors have become intertwined in this account of a mother who has rescued her children from an abusive, dysfunctional father. This is a family who has had to adjust to a series of events, or what Bronfenbrenner refers to as 'ecological transitions'. These transitions both arise from, and result in, changes to the family circumstances, home and school settings, and the parental role. The dynamics of past experiences, wilful personalities, medical problems and educational difficulties intertwine to form a complex history. It is the interplay of these dynamics with different teachers and schools which provides the seedbed for the parent-teacher relationships which result. For some teachers, problematising the family takes precedence over seeing the child as an individual pupil with educational difficulties which can be addressed with mutuality and

reciprocity on both sides. This approach, whilst providing a ready solution for the teachers who adopt it, is neither beneficial to Michael nor in accordance with his mother's unflinching determination to maximise his life chances. Relationships which are sustained demonstrate shared priorities, and a mutual engagement which involves, rather than rejects, both the child and his mother. Both the headmaster who takes him under his wing, and the teacher who puts in that little bit extra reap the rewards of their labour as Michael both recognises and responds to their initiatives. Between them they have negotiated potential barriers, utilised reciprocity, flexibility and common sense to arrive at a place where shared understandings and joint practices benefit all.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter presents two alternative versions of an "ideal partnership" followed by the dyadic case studies each of which includes a summary of its defining features. In the following chapter, I draw upon the data provided by the two studies in Chapters 6 and 7 as I revisit, interpret, discuss and provide answers to my research questions.

Chapter 8. The Findings

8.1 Introduction

I begin this chapter by revisiting my original research questions (Q1-Q6 below). Transcripts from both studies, the preliminary study which consists purely of parental accounts and the Main (dyadic) Study, provide the data on which my analysis is based. The analysis of the empirical findings proffer an account of complex relationships which influence the understanding and meeting of children's needs. The defining features of each dyadic case study reveals a spectrum of types of relationships which vary according to their potential to become transformed into, and sustain themselves as, forms of working partnerships consistent with Wenger's idealised model of a 'community of practice'.

I then look at three key aspects of the 'community of practice', namely, the learning which takes place, the processes involved and the nature of practice. Following this I present my findings in respect of the meta-question which evolved as the thesis developed.

8.2 The research questions

Q1. Are individual parents' understandings of their child's problems/difficulties/special educational needs similar or different to those of their child's teachers?

Q2. If the parental perceptions or understanding of a child's problems/difficulties/special educational needs differ from those of their child's teacher, does this influence the teacher's interpretation and management of the individual child's difficulties at primary school?

Q3. If there are different understandings of the problems that individual children experience in primary school, (how) does this affect the relationship and dialogue between the child's parents and teachers?

Q4. What are the kinds or forms of dynamics, for example, processes, procedures, events and relationships, inherent in the arriving (or not arriving) at agreement between parents and teachers in respect of the nature and management of individual children's difficulties at primary school?

Q5. *How do individual teachers and parents work together, or otherwise, in sorting out children's problems and difficulties?*

Q6. *Assuming that both parents and teachers are involved in seeking "a way forward" in the management of children's difficulties, can additional advice, information, knowledge/expertise accumulated by parents from sources other than the school constitute a basis for negotiation?*

My first question seeks to determine whether parents' understandings of their child's difficulties are similar or different to those of their child's teachers. From the literature review in Chapter 2, we can see that the many different conceptualisations of what constitutes "(special) educational needs" render it a highly contested and problematic issue. We also know that different kinds of knowledge possessed by parents and teachers drawn and emanating from a variety of sources, can lead to disagreement as to what constitutes a problem and that this has implications for the types of initial discussions between parents and teachers (Miller, 1996).

Given this, the likelihood of parents and teachers holding different understandings of special educational needs is high. My interpretation of the transcripts, particularly those from the preliminary study which only includes parental accounts, is that parents perceive there to be many differences between their understanding of their child's difficulties and needs and that held by the child's teacher. Alternative definitions and interpretations of "special educational needs" provide a partial explanation for this. 7 year old Mary, for example, is failing to achieve at school and sits at the "bottom" table with other children who are struggling to achieve educationally. Mary's mother is concerned about her daughter's emotional well-being: *'I used to have to physically take her to school every morning and she'd be in floods of tears before she went into class [...] and the welfare lady would come and say "Oh, she's got a tummy-ache again" and I'd think "Well why the hell doesn't anybody tell me this is happening?" and her loss of self-confidence and self-esteem: 'All the reports that she'd had up till then said she was a natural leader, really up front, real actress, all these sorts of things. And now I was seeing the exhibits of a child who was losing confidence. That's what concerned me' (M2).* Mary is assessed privately by an educational psychologist whose report suggests that she is a highly intelligent child who is

under-achieving. Teachers at Mary's school interpret the report as meaning that Mary is: *'A gifted child' who is 'able' and 'definitely wasn't SEN. [...] Their exact words were "A child of this ability definitely isn't a special needs child". I did ask for a definition but they were unable to answer me'* (M2). This account suggests that specific criteria used to define SEN can be narrow, overriding concerns about a child who is failing to thrive either emotionally or educationally. This is an example of understandings of SEN, derived from fields which operate within different conceptual frameworks²², producing distinct theories and practices which lead to a divergence in understandings between parents and teachers.

The multiple understandings which characterise SEN emerge again in Jason's story in the preliminary study. Jason's parents evaluate the provision their son is being offered by his school. They reject and withdraw Jason from what they consider to be inappropriate provision. The school offers no alternative provision and provides Jason with no extra support. At this point Jason is effectively *'not within the system anymore'* (M8) and is no longer considered by the school to have SEN. Here, pedagogical inflexibility results in special educational provision which is not differentiated to meet the needs of individual pupils. In this instance, the socially constructed criteria which define "special educational needs" relate more to the provision available than to the assessment of individual need.

I found that it was not uncommon for parents to be alerted to their children's difficulties in ways which are not always apparent to educational professionals. At the time of my interview with his mother, 12 year old Colin was attending a special school for children with moderate learning difficulties. His mother believes that initially, when Colin was much younger, his teachers misinterpreted and misunderstood his behaviour: *'I think, because he was quite a boisterous child, they...his sort of ways of avoidance tactics and everything, they thought he was probably just being naughty, whereas I could see that ...he couldn't cope'* (M6). This difference in interpretation of behaviour is also suggested by Michael's mother, herself a teacher. Michael was consistently being excluded from schools. His mother believes that his difficulties *'socialising'* lead him into trouble. She describes how his behaviour is aggravated by a lack of

²² See Chapter 2.

understanding on the part of his teachers: *'He'd probably try a bit too hard and end up hurting somebody and then he'd get into trouble. I think if people think badly of him he just sort of lives up to their...well, it's like a self-fulfilling prophecy isn't it really, you know? With, I think, most of the professionals he was involved with, it was a behaviour problem'*. Michael's mother is adamant that her son does not have EBD, but that his behaviour is *'because of something else'* (M10). For these parents, the focus upon "bad" behaviour by teachers serves to mask and delay alternative understandings of their children's difficulties.

In section 4.6.3 and Appendix 2, I draw together extracts from the dyadic accounts of parents and teachers describing children, who, in every case, are giving "cause for concern". Here an initial consensus of concern emerges irrespective of similarities and differences in parents' and teachers' understandings and interpretations of learning difficulties, and irrespective of their interpretations of the cause and nature of educational difficulties. This initial consensus opens up "spaces" for extending understandings and negotiating provision. Clearly however, given the above extracts, it cannot be assumed that consensus is to be found amongst all parents and teachers. Indeed across the cases studied there are many references to a lack of initial consensus often manifested by early parental concern being interpreted by teachers as over-reaction by parents. Many such divergences of views appear to be rooted in the "no-man's land" which so often lies between the professional's academic knowledge and the parent's common sense or lay knowledge.

Table 6 charts the similarities and differences in understandings amongst the parents and teachers in this study.

Table 6. Similarities and differences among parents' and teachers' understandings of children's difficulties

Similarities	Differences
"Cause for concern"	<p>Explanations for behaviour</p> <p>Expectations of progress (particularly for boys)</p> <p>Interpretations of "problems"</p> <p>Interpretations of the cause and nature (diagnosis) of educational difficulties</p> <p>Understandings of the need for an early acknowledgement of a problem</p> <p>"Good practice" procedures for children experiencing difficulties</p>

Similarities manifest themselves in an agreement that a child is giving "cause for concern". Differences manifest themselves in individual interpretations of the cause and nature of educational difficulties. Differences in interpretations are particularly apparent in the parental accounts which offer the clearest indications of how professional academic knowledge can contrast with common-sense or lay knowledge and lead to discordant understandings of children's difficulties.

Q2. If the parental perceptions or understanding of a child's problems/difficulties/special educational needs differ from those of their child's teacher, does this influence the teacher's interpretation and management of the individual child's difficulties at primary school?

This question arises when an initial consensus of concern is not present or when some, or all, of the differences in understanding outlined above are present. It is not uncommon in these circumstances for parents to seek another opinion. One unexpected finding is that this seeking of another opinion can "negatively" impact upon teacher practice with unintended consequences for the management of children's difficulties. Many of the parents who seek a report from a private educational psychologist do so in the belief that the report will influence the teacher's interpretation and thereafter subsequent management of a child's

difficulties: *'There was I thinking: "This is gonna be the end of it; present this (private report) to the head teacher and she'll say "Oh yes"'. This is an assumption which can prove to be erroneous: 'The headteacher just said "Well, you do surprise me," and passed it off like that' (M1).* Parents hope that private reports will help to reconcile alternative perspectives, that they will alert the school to their child's difficulties, as they perceive them, and that agreement will be reached as to the appropriate provision for their child: *'So I went into a meeting thinking "They're now listening, there is a problem, they've got the report, they're gonna put an IEP together"'(M2).* However, consensus can be difficult to obtain. When Mary's parents meet the teachers it is made clear to them that the school's interpretation of the child's potential ability places the child outside of their definition of SEN and her parents are: *'Hit with "None of that's gonna happen"'. In the circumstances it is perhaps not altogether surprising that the mother expresses the feelings of a victim under attack: 'They were using it (the report) as a tool against me by this stage' (M2).* The very strategies that Mary's parents choose to reconcile differences in understanding effect a "negative" influence upon teacher practice. This increases, rather than reduces, the gulf in understandings between parents and teacher and fails to bring them any nearer to a mutual understanding of the child's problems.

Another mother describes how she feels she failed to influence the teacher's interpretation and management of her daughter's difficulties: *'Always when I suggested something they would say, "Yes, we'll do that", or whatever, but they were never proactive. [...] I just think they had no awareness of the problems that she was suffering...and so every time I tried to point something out they had a rather negative attitude towards it' (M7).* However, questions of influence upon teacher practice can not, and should not, be considered uniquely from the perspective of parents. The following extracts from two of the teachers' transcripts suggest the reflective processes involved in the decision making which underpins teacher practice: *'I do things the way I see them... because I have a reason for what I do' (T2).* Another teacher tries to explain: *'I think I altered the way I taught him myself, because of...his difficulties as I saw them throughout the first few weeks of my teaching him. I didn't change the way I taught the whole class, but I changed the way I taught that group, yeah,*

definitely, yeah' (T10). The two most experienced teachers in the study hold opposing viewpoints as to the benefits or otherwise of "allowing" parents to influence their practice. The first, a SENCo, describes how listening to parents influenced her practice: *'I probably acted quicker because (the mother) had spoken to me than I may have done otherwise. It helped me to look specifically at things rather than trying to find the difficulties. I already had a quick route to them because the parents had told me'* (T5). However, the second teacher appears both ambivalent and sceptical about the "influence potential" of parental perceptions: *'Obviously the parent knows their child best and although they've got a different view point and they may not know exactly how the child behaves differently in school, but they are the ones who've got... initially they have the problem, they identify the problem...so, it's all coming from them, so you know, I'm responding to them but [...] can't believe everything because they may misunderstand the situation or...they may have been very over-worried about something [...] There's no sort of dawning light saying 'Oh look, this child needs such and such and I don't think I have...or that's not being provided'* (T4). The words of this highly experienced teacher suggest that other ways of understanding children's needs contribute little to either his understanding of children's difficulties or his practice.

It seems that parents whose understandings of their child's problems differ from those of their child's teacher have limited influence upon the teacher's interpretation and management of the child's difficulties. When parental contributions are viewed positively by the teacher parents may be able to influence the teacher's interpretation and management of the child's difficulties. Positive indicators of parental influence upon teacher's practice include signs of a convergence of different perspectives in relationship to the management of a child's difficulties. Some teachers choose to ignore parental understandings of the child's needs and it then becomes difficult, if not impossible, for parents to exert any influence upon the teacher's interpretation and management of the child's difficulties. These findings suggest that the extent to which parents have any influence over teacher practice is, at least initially, "controlled" by teachers. Whilst this may confound official policies and recommendations as to how parent-professional relations should be conducted (see Chapter 2), it highlights

the interrelationship between professional knowledge and the kinds of knowledge which parents have. The latter, as is empirically demonstrated in this thesis (see Chapter 6), being a mix of acquired information and knowledge abstracted from personal experience.

Q3. If there are different understandings of the problems that individual children experience in primary school, (how) does this affect the relationship and dialogue between the child's parents and teachers?

Given that different understandings of children's difficulties exist (Q1) and that parental influence upon teacher practice occurs mainly at the teacher's discretion (Q2) my third question seeks to illuminate how these two "conditions" impact upon parent-teacher relationships. Within the empirical findings (see Chapters 6 and 7) there are examples of parents describing incidences which they experience as challenges or potential barriers to either their participation, or that of their children, in the decision-making processes. For parents, such incidences are often interpreted as "critical moments" which determine the subsequent direction that the relationship will take. Parents refer to disputes which centre around the status and validity attributed to different sources of knowledge or information and of judgements made by teachers about parental common sense or tacit knowledge. They express their anger and concern about the damage done by teacher assumptions, (usually of low expectations), negative attitudes, stereotyping and blaming techniques. In their conversations with teachers, parents speak of voiced and unvoiced agendas, negative responses, closure or dismissal tactics, prevarication, avoidance techniques and delaying tactics. They also refer to differences in values and belief systems. Teachers, on the other hand, speak critically about the "wrong attitude": *'Oh my goodness they're never gonna get anywhere'* (T6), that some parents have towards their children's difficulties. They express the belief that parents can have unrealistic understandings of the child's ability and fail to understand what the teacher is trying to achieve with the child. The division of labour can also be controversial with *'Some parents unfortunately see it very much as our job, rather than their job as well'* and other parents *'who've been more than wanting to help, they've actually wanted to come in and change what you've done'* (T10). Teachers want parents to trust in the teacher's professional ability, to take their advice and to

support their decisions. They are happy to rely upon the school system to tell them if they are doing something and wrong and do not want parents *'To come in and say "You are a crap teacher". [...] They're not gonna rant and rave and really have a good slagging off, which has happened'* (T10). That this happens is confirmed by another teacher who describes how a parent *'literally brought her boyfriend at the time in to the open evening just to attack me, not physically, but "You're a teacher why can't you teach..."'* (T8).

These kind of empirical findings reflect verbal altercations between parents and teachers who disagree about the nature of children's difficulties. In the preliminary study comments made by parents tend to be general rather than specific, reflecting a history of varied relationships, dialogues and interactions with individual teachers and schools: *'They'll either do one thing or the other and that is one: they will just turn against you, or two, they will stroke your fur and just tell you what you wanna hear and then do absolutely nothing at all; or three, they will support you'* (M5). This mother aptly describes the three key positions that teachers and schools can adopt in relation to parents who raise concerns about their children at school. She notes that changes in relationships occur: *'As soon as you don't conform, and as soon as you don't go and say "Yes, you're wonderful, I accept everything single thing you say", as soon as you start to question things like "Well, why haven't you done something about it?"'* (M5). Her words are her interpretation of how individuals within schools can effect either positive and negative relationships with parents and that dialogues and relationships will change accordingly. Her words also suggest that relationships and dialogues change if parents become less quiescent and accepting of teacher dominance. A further example of this is given by another mother who notes that the relationship between herself and her son's teacher, the SENCo, underwent a noticeable change when she notified the school that she would, in future, be accompanied at meetings by a "befriender": *'Once I started asking if I could bring people along to the meetings, it became quite difficult because really at the end of the day, I don't feel that this particular teacher wanted anybody else there. What she had to say was what she had to say and that was it. It was her way and no other way'* (M6). Here, according to the parent, the introduction of a "befriender" is interpreted by the teacher as a questioning of her "expertise".

Another parent recounts how her decision to keep a written record of her meetings and discussions with her daughter's teachers leads to her relationship with the school becoming '*strained*' and '*Changed because I've written something down and I've documented everything that's happened and I've asked them to sign it. [...] They know that I won't let things go by the by, I will pick them up on things*' (M2). The implication of this seems to be that parents who seek accountability are perceived by teachers as becoming less deferential and thus less "manageable". Another parent endorses this describing how her relationship with her son's head mistress '*who reckoned she was the SENCo but didn't have the knowledge*' deteriorated as she, the parent, '*read up so I knew what I was talking about*'. She describes how '*knowing your facts*' can empower a parent: '*If you go in and the school also know their facts you know what they're telling you is right. If you go in and get an awful lot of waffle from people then a) you've got the knowledge to fight back with and b) you recognise the waffle for what it is*'. As she became better informed and more knowledgeable so she had '*less and less respect*' for the people she was '*dealing with*' (M9). One teacher describes how she feels undermined by a questioning parent-teacher who, because she accesses the same pedagogic knowledge base, queries pedagogic decisions which would be accepted unquestioningly by another parent: '*She will quote things at you. [...] It's just like no other parent would have said that to you*' (T2).²³ Accountability however is an ongoing requirement for many parents in their working lives as this parent, a nurse describes: '*If I nursed the way they teach, I'd be struck off because we have to be accountable and to prove we're accountable. [...] Everything has to be documented, if it isn't documented, it doesn't happen*' (M9).

The dyadic accounts of Peter's mother and teacher are the context for observations which are particularly insightful. Peter's mother believes that the relationship she and her husband have with the school is improved as a direct result of the initiatives they undertook on behalf of their son: '*I think because of what we did, they looked at us differently. I think they actually realised that we were serious and I actually feel that they ended up respecting us the same as we*

²³ For a fuller account see Adam (P2/T2) pp. 159-164

respected them. And I don't think we had that at the beginning, I ended up feeling that they were a friend and that I actually could open up. I could tell them any worries and they wouldn't judge me. And that's what I think you don't have at the beginning, you have that feeling that you're holding things back and maybe they're holding things back'(P5).

Peter's teacher begins by telling me that her relationship with the family has always been 'excellent'. However on reflection she becomes less certain: '*I think it probably...improved, because once when she saw us helping and getting things moving and getting the right help into him, I think she was pleased that he was getting help and was pleased about it. We became closer, more friends with each other, because I respected her for the way she was dealing with it and the way that she was informing me of every thing that was being done, out of school as well as in school. It helped to bring it all together'* (T5). Peter's parents, through the decisions they make, initiatives they take and strategies they employ, are as implicitly critical of teacher judgement as are other parents in the study. However their accounts suggest that this is not an automatic deterrent to constructive dialogue.

Q4. What are the kinds or forms of dynamics, for example, processes, procedures, events and relationships, inherent in the arriving (or not arriving) at agreement between parents and teachers in respect of the nature and management of individual children's difficulties at primary school?

My empirical analysis suggests that the search for a mutual understanding of the nature and management of children's difficulties is accompanied by a complex interplay of interconnecting dynamics. Some of these dynamics are "processes" which are on-going such as the search for additional data or evidence which corroborates or more precisely defines understandings of a problem. The process of continuous inquiry and subsequent acquisition of knowledge both acts upon, and reconstructs, personal knowledge bases. Knowledge becomes an accumulated commodity and competencies which are acquired, shared and extended result in different kinds of knowledges which inform each other. This process is inherent in the establishment of a team which maintains constant, fluid

communications and is committed to participating in a learning culture where all contributions are equally valued and open to discussion and development. One example of less than fluid communications is provided by Michael's mother, herself a teacher. Here she describes how she has written to her son's school on several occasions. However, only letters which are overtly uncritical are responded to, whilst others have: *'Just been passed on.... So if you get upset, they're (the letters) more likely to get sympathy and if you write a letter in saying "Well what were you doing to my child, putting pressure on them?" they sort of hide. You don't get a response or they pass it on saying 'Oh someone else will speak to you or...deal with it', and you're sort of going round in circles'* (M10). Ignoring letters reads as disrespectful and on a par with dialogues which demean the role of parents positioning them as inexperienced and lacking in knowledge: *'I think they should not talk down to any parent. I mean, a parent's standing in society...there shouldn't be a problem with that. The fact that maybe they're not two working parents or they're taking time out to have the children or whether the father's out of work, doesn't matter what the circumstances are, they're human beings, they're the parents of that child and they should be treated as such'* (P5).

Other dynamics are "procedures" or initiatives which contrast with "processes" in that they are not necessarily on-going but can be specific acts which progress a course of action. This parent, for example, describes specific initiatives she and her husband took which successfully transformed the initially negative responses from the school into a positive decision to implement the Statementing process: *'The only time we actually had a positive reaction was when I took my husband with me, and he was dressed in a suit and he's obviously taken time off work and suddenly I was listened to'* and *'It was after me getting very upset in the head teacher's office, throwing a pile of papers at him, rushing out in tears'*. Agreeing to consider the process involved the head teacher making observations in the classroom: *'And when he went and observed my son in the classroom he actually admitted to me, at that point, that he didn't realise quite how bad my son was and how he was struggling'* (P5). This is an example of a procedure which disrupts the complacent authority of a Headteacher without provoking a negative response. Other empirical examples of procedures which contribute to an enhanced knowledge base and influence the course of action are the extension

of networks of sources of information (to include colleagues, doctors, educational psychologists, friends, neighbours and relatives) and the subsequent deployment of information and knowledge drawn from sources other than the school (for example, research reports, the Internet, television, radio, and libraries). Other kinds of procedures undertaken by parents have to be repeated annually as this mother describes: *'Every year he starts a new year, we go to meet the teacher, I always make sure that they know and don't rely on the school records system to tell them'* (P6). Most parents in the study used similar strategies to keep teachers "on the ball": *'It's a slow process but you've got to keep going in to see the teacher. [...] You've got to go out and find out for yourself and then go equipped'* (P4).

Although neither a process nor procedure, influence can be a significant dynamic in parent-teacher relationships. In the context of this research, influence is the effect of a person or thing upon another in order to persuade, induce or initiate a specific effect such as the production of a quiescent "partner". Here for example, a teacher describes how *'influencing parents'* can be a necessary prerequisite to *'a relationship with parents'*: *'You have to try really hard. Even if a parent is slightly antagonistic, you can see it straight away and you have to try and defuse that. It's quite difficult, it's quite a skill to be able to do that but you have to try and get things calm so that you can actually build up a relationship with parents. [...] You can't influence very much until you have that relationship with the parent so that you both feel that you are an equal partnership, and you both feel you are contributing to that child...moving that child's difficulties forward'* (T5). Influencing however has several guises and here the same teacher describes how she found herself moved by an initiative taken by the parent: *'(When his) parents showed photos of him in hospital - it really made me realise why his parents were so concerned!'* (T5). Both parent and teacher are involved in influencing each other, the teacher with words and the parent with the production of physical evidence in the form of a photograph of a child on a life-support machine. The latter proves to be the critical moment or event which triggers a dialogue which leads to a consensus as to the management of the boy's difficulties.

Differentiation of modes of address and the demarcation of territories are attributes of interpersonal communication which can contribute to a failure to arrive at agreement in respect of the nature and management of children's difficulties. This kind of differentiation can work against consensus if it results in parents feeling themselves positioned within a system which dictates roles and responsibilities and constrains their participation in their children's education. One parent who is also a salaried employee of the school brings this into sharp relief: *'The head talks to other members of staff there, and she calls them by their first name but when she sees me coming it's: "Oh Mrs XYZ..." as though I'm not part of it* (P1). However teachers too can be positioned within school hierarchies which restrict their activities: *'There was only so far she could go and at the end of the day it was the head teacher's decision'* (M4) or feel themselves constrained to isolation: *'I don't feel other teachers respect my opinion'* (T1).

For some teachers an unquestionable acceptance by parents that "teacher knows best" is a required dynamic in the parent-teacher relationship. In the following extracts from the dyadic study, the teacher enthuses about a parent's apparent compliance: *'She would listen to me and would accept everything I said, whereas normally if you have a parent that has different views to you, they will argue their point. [...] She agreed with everything I said and we always tried to work together on the best way forward. And I think we did have the same view of him as from my professional point of view, and from her parent point of view'* (T6). However "apparent compliance" is not a robust indicator of a process that will lead to agreement or consensus as the parent's account shows. Here she describes what happened after she decided to have her son assessed privately and her words cast doubt upon the nature of this apparent compliance: *'You do it yourself and then they're, there's that kind of, almost, that you've gone over their heads, you know? Obviously they felt that it wasn't necessary, they weren't interested in moving him up or, you know.... In the end I felt it was very much more for me than for them, and that nothing was gonna be done however much I pushed or shouted or yelled. [...] Their response...was none, really, you know'* (P6). Sometimes actions speak louder than words and this parent's choice of action: *'I spoke to the head, and he said he would discuss the report with her so I*

presume he did' (P6) raises further doubt upon the teacher's perception of the relationship as one of consensus and unity.

The situated nature of parent-teacher relationships means that different networks and 'communities of practice' will influence to a greater or lesser degree how challenges are met and faced. Some challenges arise from the structural or external constraints which envelop relationships as these teachers explain: *'Obviously we've got professional constraints to work within. Parents just very much have tunnel vision and only see their child and their child's needs, which is rightly so as a parent, but as a teacher you've got another thirty-one. [...] At the end of the day these thirty-one other children in the class mean nothing to them. It's just their child which means everything to them. And rightly so, but obviously there is a conflict there'* (T9). And: *'The teacher is actually under pressure a certain amount from the system that they're trying to get this child up to a level which is expected by external things like the government'* (T5).

Consensus benefits from the formation of networks which can negotiate external constraints and which are sustained through the sharing of the mutual goal of helping the child. The practice which results demonstrates reciprocity in the co-construction of knowledge, reflection and an exchange of ideas. It represents a source of coherence arising from, and maintaining, a process of collective learning in which expertise is traded, solutions are negotiated and agreements reached as to the nature and management of children's difficulties. The procedure for initiating and maintaining such networks involves the formal or informal establishing of an initiator, or broker (see Conor P9/T9). Certain kinds of "events" can facilitate either agreements or disagreements between parents and teachers. These include not only the more formal meetings between parents and educational professionals which take place during parents evenings and assessments for example, but include less formal meetings and learning opportunities such as the school play and school trips. These events have the potential to provide opportunities for crossing the boundaries which limit parental participation in the schooling of their children. One mother found the potential space for negotiating meanings between herself and the school was compromised because of the lack of consensus as to his difficulties. The school journey offers a rare opportunity for the boy to be viewed as an individual. His

mother recounts how his teacher, who previously had a negative view about him, now sees him in a different light saying: '*We had a lovely time with him, we saw him for what he was*' which generates the following riposte: '*How awful is that [...] they never saw him for his best*' (P7). The school journey presents the opportunity for boundaries to be crossed. However, coming at the end of Year 6 it is too late for any negotiation between herself and the school which would have allowed her to participate more fully in her son's schooling.

Relationships which typify non-agreement between parents and teachers often demonstrate open criticism and questioning of authority, expertise or judgement, alongside a lack of acknowledgement of the status of different kinds and sources of knowledge (i.e. intuition, common-sense judgement and expertise). This kind of relationship can arise from a failure by parents and teachers to research the problem together and to negotiate different understandings and meanings. These relationships suffer through an inability to overcome the "them and us" scenarios, a signifier of non-consensus, and through the maintenance of positions in which power relations impede opportunities for negotiation. Relationships which tend towards consensus are characterised by mutual respect, effective communication and action which is perceived to be appropriate. Failure to reach agreement between parents and teachers as to the nature and management of children's difficulties arises from a lack of mutual respect, ineffective communication and inappropriate action. For some parents and teachers arriving at an initial consensus that a child is giving "cause for concern" is unproblematic. For other parents and teachers, arriving at an agreed understanding has to be worked at and in some instances consensus, or agreement, is never achieved. I found very little within the data which specifically helped me to describe the processes involved in arriving at agreement ²⁴. However I did find indications that suggest that when parents find themselves unable to reach agreement with teachers they opt for complementary or alternative strategies or procedures in order to address their children's needs as they understand them. One such procedure may involve bypassing individual

²⁴ It is, nevertheless, an area worthy of further research

teachers as is the case with Julia's mother (see p.188), another is the 'making of another life' (see p.183).

Q5. How do individual teachers and parents work together, or otherwise, in sorting out children's problems and difficulties?

From my reading of the dyadic transcripts I identified ten variations of "working together" some of which appear to be more successful than others did. These variations, expanded upon in section 8.5 below, are as follows:

The "**mutually supportive**" variant is the least common mode of working together. It occurs when there is a mutual consensus between parent and teacher that a child is experiencing difficulties, and when, at the same time, both parent and teacher individually experience feelings of isolation and non-inclusive practices within the school.

The "**antagonistic**" variant describes the relationship between two professionals one of whom is the teacher and the other a parent who has multi-membership of different communities, for example, a parent-teacher or parent-governor. The antagonism arises when the parent has a greater wealth of insight, knowledge and experience of the child's problems than the teacher who has the authority and power to decide what happens.

The "**restricted participation**" variant describes the position of a mother who, constrained by family circumstances, is positioned as a "bad" parent by the teacher. The resulting dislocations means that the mother operates within a restricted version of participation and engagement with the school which thwarts attempts to develop an effective parent-teacher partnership.

The "**benign ignorance**" variant describes a parent-teacher relationship which appears to be unproblematic. Under closer scrutiny however it becomes apparent that the relationship is grounded in paradox in that it effectively only sustains itself through a restricted mode of communication. The "**benign ignorance**" mode describes a spiral of unintended consequences.

The “**convertible**” variant of working together describes the parent-teacher relationship, born in discord and misunderstanding, which develops into a relationship built on trust and respect.

The “**positive deception**” variant is one in which the parent overcomes the dilemmas of power relationships arising from the multi-membership of different communities by feigning compliance with the teacher. The deliberate use of apparent compliance is, tactically, a “necessary evil” for the parent who seeks to sustain the relationship in the hope that it will, in the fullness of time, develop into a productive partnership.

The “**procrastination**” or “**wait, see and monitor**” variant is another version of the feigned compliance or “positive deception” variant whereby the parent overcomes misgivings, acquiesces to the teacher, but remains vigilant. This variation of working together includes an “agreement to differ” which can sustain a viable relationship through the potential conflict which can arise due to divergent perspectives. The “**procrastination**” variant can usefully defer confrontation.

The “**compensatory**” variant of working together can occur when a lack of consensus leads to irreconcilable differences between parent and teacher. This situation can lead a parent to provide alternative and compensatory education outside of school which is not shared with, the child’s teacher.

The “**complementary**” variant is another version of the “**compensatory**” variant of working together but differs in that strategic (alternative) resources are offered by the parent to the teacher in order to re-start a relationship which has not yet reached the point of being irreconcilable.

The “**networking**” variant of working together describes a sharing of repertoires, information and theories amongst a team who maintain constant contact and communication with each other. The “**networking**” mode relies upon a broker whose mission it is to form and sustain a network of people committed to participating in a learning culture where all contributions are equally valued and where different kinds of knowledge combine to inform each other.

Relationships between parents and teachers who succeed in working together to sort out children's difficulties demonstrate mechanisms which allow for joint meaning-making and continuity of agreed strategies. Although occasionally the result of benign ignorance, the characteristics of these mechanisms include "sharing", "honesty", "open relationships", "open communication lines", "inclusive practices" and "mutual respect". The same characteristics tend to be lacking in the parent-teacher relationship which fails to manifest a joint approach to the resolution of children's difficulties.

Q6. Assuming that both parents and teachers are involved in seeking "a way forward" in the management of children's difficulties, can additional advice, information, knowledge/expertise accumulated by parents from sources other than the school constitute a basis for negotiation?

Understanding how schools respond to and deploy, if indeed they do, the potential resource offered by parents provides a lens through which to view the dynamics of mutuality and reciprocity between parents and teachers involved in the important task of meeting children's needs. Is the accessing and deploying of knowledge from sources other than from within the school a practice which can generate 'action and participation' (Popkewitz and Brennan, 1998, p.5) in the form of negotiations between parents and teachers?

Clearly, if the initial assumption that both parents and teachers seek "a way forward" in the management of children's difficulties is correct then it follows that any additional advice, information, knowledge or expertise accumulated by parents constitutes an additional contribution to the communal bank of knowledge and expertise deployed by teachers. This in turn becomes a basis for negotiation either of meaning or resources. However the process of negotiation depends upon the teacher and parent's personal judgement as to the value of additional information and his or her individual understandings of "good" pedagogic practice. Whether or not parental participation in information gathering and giving is received with indifference or interest by teachers is itself an indicator as to whether "seeking a way forward" is a genuinely mutual enterprise for them.

Several parents in the study had experience of teachers who seemed to completely ignore any information or advice which came from sources other than the school: *'I've given them loads of information. They take the information and I assume that they read it, I don't know. I've given them the second report; they gave it me back, actually, the next day. So whether they've read it or not, they didn't come back to me and say "We've read it, we think...we can see this, we can see that"'* (P2), and: *'I gave a copy to the SENCo and she said that the teacher would read it, [...] which I don't know if she did or not* (P4). A variation on this is the negative or counterproductive result described by some parents to the information they share with schools: *'Oh well, he has private tuition, we don't have to bother too much. We'll do things our way and the sooner we get rid of him the better, sort of thing'* (M1). One mother's comment that: *'There should be much more respect for what people know'* (P5) suggests that parents and teachers do not always share the same values in relation to alternative sources of information and advice. This would seem to be confirmed by the following extract which suggests that a "vetting" process takes place by teachers of the potential value of parental information: *'I would want to know where they had looked, whether it was on the Internet, whether it was books. I'd want to know where they had been gathering their information to make sure that they had accurate information'* (T5). Parental knowledge, that is the personal knowledge that a parent, rather than a teacher, has of a child, is valued more highly by some teachers than others. This teacher for example claims to respect parental knowledge: *'Their knowledge of the child, you can't argue with that. They are the people who know the child more than anybody. They certainly know them better than the teacher. The teacher only knows one side of that child, the parent knows everything about that child except how they're performing in the classroom'* (T5), whilst another is more cautious: *'Some parents have got very sound knowledge and others come in with a very idealistic knowledge'* (T9).

There is little evidence that information offered by parents automatically constitutes a basis for negotiation. One mother, who describes herself as *'proactive'* in keeping her daughter's teacher fully informed, believes that her approach has contributed to a consensus as to the nature and management of the child's difficulties. However, the class teacher evaluation of the usefulness of

this mother's "information file" to his practice contradicts this belief. It may well be that for this teacher, as for others, "additional" information that parents offer is simply not helpful. Here he describes how he '*scanned*' the information in the file but it '*Didn't have anything that I would find terribly helpful. Correspondence, well, you know, it's a guide...a) to know that somebody's being helped outside that they've been tested and so on and that they've been put into a group and so on in a previous year and, and any letters which...I would have read and ...that's about it. You know, we just carry on from there*' (T4). There is no suggestion here that negotiation, either of meaning or of provision, forms any part of this teacher's practice. However, in complete contrast, are the words of a teacher from overseas for whom negotiating agreed meanings and understandings is crucial: '*All I was given was an SEN file, which I looked through, and that was it. No-one came and spoke to me about where, what he had done, where he should go. I didn't meet with the SENCo at all. [...] I've never spoken to anyone other than his mum*' (T1).

I found only two direct examples of processes of negotiation which occurred as a direct result of additional advice or information being offered by parents from sources other than the school. The first is "Fred's story" (see p.179) in which the mother, an experienced special needs assistant describes how her son, who seeks to be actively involved in his own learning, devises an alternative to the prescribed, unvarying "special needs" homework. His mother supports his initiative and negotiates alternative provision with his class teacher based on her son's proposition: '*He would like to draw a sort of four-thingy cartoon, and he will use his spelling words in the cartoon. He'll make it fit the spelling words*' (P6). This is both accepted and acceptable but later, without warning or discussion, the initially successful attempt at negotiation is reversed by the teacher without explanation.

The second example of negotiation arises in respect of provision for a boy (Alan) whose difficulties are not recognised by the school. The lack of consensus as to whether the boy has the kind of educational difficulties identified by an independent educational psychologist leads to provision being offered which is conditional upon the family's compliance with stringent terms and conditions set by the LEA and the school. This attempt at negotiation suggests that this child's

hidden disability is perceived ambivalently. However the negotiation is one-sided and for the child's family, the non-negotiable terms set by the LEA and the school are effectively impossible for them to meet. In both of these examples attempts at negotiation are thwarted by a lack of practical orientation towards negotiation as a two-way mutually agreed endeavour. In both cases, poor practice reflects weaknesses at the level of individual relationships between teachers and parents and both examples reflect how negotiation and dialogue is likely to be pivotal in the assessment, diagnosis and provision for children with special educational needs.

As already noted, the growth of new forms of accountability within education has been instrumental in changing the perceptions of the roles and functions of teachers and parents in education (Sayer, 1989; Munn, 1993; Knill and Humphreys, 1996). Educational reforms have resulted in confusion leading to a lack of clarity as to the nature of the educating role, and a blurring of the distinctive positions held by both parents and teachers. As a direct result of reforms, there has been a move towards a clearer official, or at least rhetorical, affirmation, of the role of parents as participators in their children's education accompanied by a shift in parental attitudes away from positional deference in respect of professional knowledge. The employment of increasing numbers of people, usually mothers, within schools as teaching assistants, support assistants and mentors contributes to the ever increasing opportunities for parents to access information which assists in the making of informed decisions and in negotiating agreed meanings, as this mother articulates: *'I'm lucky in that I also work in school so I have access to ideas, and games and books, and see things that could help'* (P6).

Having greater access to a range of sources of information however does not equate with an automatic reduction in either confusion or uncertainty and ambiguous positionings can muddy the potential that an accumulated bank of knowledge has to function as a basis for negotiation. Strong indications from the analysis undertaken here suggests that although parental anxiety may decrease as their knowledge increases the same is not true for teachers whose fear of displacement from the expert profession position may increase. This emerges strongly from much of the parental testimony. Parents who access the same

pedagogical knowledge base as teachers may undermine the status of teachers. The emotions subsequently generated can constrain the scope of engagement, resulting in the opening up of potential chasms for negative interactions between parent and school, and teacher and school, with consequences for the child. This can result, paradoxically, in some teachers and schools embracing a culture of professional exclusivity in order to reinforce the professional's understanding of his/her position. This culture can generate sites which actively discourage negotiation and within which educational professionals perform a gatekeeping function in respect of privileging certain knowledge(s). Within such schools, the curtailing or restricting of choices available to parents and pupils functions as a mechanism for limiting, or even excluding, the participation of parents and pupils.

Finally, for parents and teachers who do actively seek "a way forward" all additional advice, from whatever source, has the potential to become a basis for negotiation. Conor's mother consistently seeks and acquires information about her son's difficulties. She shares all of this with his teachers who both recognise and value the reciprocal exchange of information. This mother's contribution, which, as his teacher put it, *'Enhanced our understanding rather than changed our opinion'* (T9) makes it possible *'to channel the help so that Conor could get exactly what he needed'* (T9). Together the joint expertise drawn from several sources becomes a means of negotiation for acquiring the additional resources to meet Conor's needs.

8.3 Addressing the meta-question

As the research progressed, one over-arching meta-question began to preoccupy me. I wanted to explore whether partnerships between parents and teachers could be (re)constituted or (re)configured as 'communities of practice' with the potential to aid the resolution of children's educational problems through processes of negotiation. I begin by considering key aspects of the 'community of practice' theory before focussing upon the three characteristic dimensions which define a 'community of practice'. I answer my question by drawing upon both Wenger's idealised model of a 'community of practice' (see section 4.7) and the empirical findings of this thesis.

8.4 Learning, process and practice.

Lave and Wenger's seminal account of learning in 'communities of practice' triggered a qualitative shift in conceptualising relations between learning and participation in which learning is seen as a relational and not an individual process (Lineham and McCarthy, 2000). Within theories of learning which view learning from the abstract stance of pedagogy the setting for learning is 'simply assumed not to matter' (Brown and Duguid, 1991, p.47). The 'community of practice' framework favours the view that 'learners can in one way or another be seen to construct their understanding out of a wide range of materials that include ambient social and physical circumstances and the histories and social relations of the people involved' (Brown and Duguid, 1991, p.47). Conditions and context are vital to understanding learning and practice, in other words: 'What is learned is profoundly connected to the conditions in which it is learned (Brown and Duguid, 1991, p.48).

The theory presents 'an analytical viewpoint' on learning which is applicable across many different situations (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.40). 'Communities of practice' are activity systems that include individuals who are united in action and in the meaning that action has for them. They are not formal structures such as the departments or project teams which Lindkvist (2005) refers to as 'collectivities of practice' (see section 3.4), but informal entities which 'exist in the minds of their members, and are glued together by the connections the members have with each other, and by their specific shared problems or areas of interest' (Ardichvili, Page and Wentling, 2002, p.3). Learning, occurs when members participate in problem solving and share the knowledge necessary to solve the problem (Wenger, 1998):

Learning is the engine of practice, and practice is the history of learning. As a consequence, communities of practice have life cycles that reflect such a process. They come together, they develop, they evolve, they disperse, according to the timing, the logic, the rhythms, and the social energy of their learning (Wenger, 1998, p.96).

Learning is not about receiving or constructing "objective" individual knowledge, but is about individuals learning to function within a group or community who share a common interest or goal. Learning is thus located in the process of the ongoing construction of co-participation, with knowing being an activity by

specific people in specific circumstances (Adler, 1998). The 'community of practice' is a fertile plain of shared ideas in which knowledge and information is exchanged 'formally, informally, incidentally, experientially, tacitly and through socialization' (Taylor, 1999, no page numbers), and learning depends upon who brings what knowledge into the group and how people interact together on a personal and intellectual level:

'The wider the knowledge 'catchment area' offered by a group of people, the greater the prospect that incoming information will relate to what is already known. It also provides opportunities for linking old knowledge in new ways, which is the basis upon which innovation and creativity depend' (Taylor, 1999, no page numbers.).

Learning within a 'community of practice' is shaped by a shared desire to understand and experience events from multiple perspectives and a preparedness to consider various and diverse perspectives through dialoguing with others. For parents and teachers jointly involved in the education of children the importance of this mode of participative learning could not be greater. However, demonstrating what, how or when learning takes place within 'communities of practice' is no easy task given, as Wenger says, that 'it is not so clear where they begin and end' (Wenger, 1998, p.96). This is because boundaries between 'communities of practice' are not fixed but are flexible and continuously shifting so can be difficult to identify.

Nevertheless, my analysis of the data indicates both that participative learning between teachers and parents takes place and that some teachers value it as a resource for helping children:

'It's just taking everything on board really, and using the good bits and bits that perhaps you don't agree with.[...] I think parents have got a very important part to play. Strategies that have been proven to work in the classroom can filter through to home and vice versa'. [...] Sometimes it's very easy to assume what we think is best for the child without actually consulting the child and finding out what they find difficult, why they find it difficult and what they would like us to do to help them'(T9).

'A parent can tell you about the child at home. What, for example, is their homework strategy? Do they do it in ten minutes, when in class they seem to

take pride in their work; why do they do it in ten minutes at home? I love to know those sorts of things. Are the children pretending to know things in class and then it's coming out at home that they're not knowing it?' (T10)

'(A parent's) knowledge of their child, you can't argue with that. They are the people who know the child more than anybody. They certainly know them better than the teacher. The teacher only knows one side of the child, the parent knows everything about that child except how they're performing in the classroom' (T5).

Hodkinson and Hodkinson argue that the significance of individual dispositions and biography in relation to the development of 'communities of practice' is 'acknowledged, but underdeveloped and arguably over-theorised' (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2003, p.5). They ground their argument 'in the complexities of concrete experience' (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2003, p.6) and attempt to build in dispositions to learning and work of real individuals related to past lives and careers. In the case of teachers who have been members of a community of teachers for several years Hodkinson and Hodkinson argue that it may become impossible to separate out learning careers from the evolution of the 'community of practices' to which they belong (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2003, p.17). This may explain why some teachers have difficulty in accepting parents as partners in a 'community of practice'.

One of the key characteristics of the parent-teacher 'community of practice' is the continual striving for new and better ways to work with the child giving cause for concern. This kind of learning, 'is the very nature of the practice that determines full membership of this particular community' (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2003, p.17). The learning which takes place is understood within the relationship between that community and the developing dispositions towards working and learning of its participating members. But neither the learning careers of individual members nor the 'communities of practice' which they participate in can be separated out from the wider contextual issues within which they are embedded and which provide both tensions and opportunities for their members.

For parents and teachers learning within a 'community of practice' is a dynamic process of being engaged in, and finely tuning, ongoing practice by learning the

meanings and practices which bind them together. The 'community of practice' captures the sense in which people share and exchange knowledge, some of which is internalised or tacit, by allowing them to talk about their experiences. Talking, which clearly involves exchanging information necessary to progress activities, is also about exchanging stories, engaging and focussing attention. For Lave and Wenger, becoming knowledgeable in a practice entails learning to talk within and about practice. Within the 'community of practice' learners interpret, reflect and form meaning because the community provides the setting for the social interaction needed to engage in dialogue with others. Interaction allows for various and diverse perspectives on any issue to be seen. Practice, enhanced by analysis and reflection, allows for the sharing of tacit understandings and the creation of shared knowledge from the experiences among participants in a learning opportunity (Wenger 1998).

Talking is an important way of learning, because it provides for the sharing of information not only about how to proceed but also about meanings, norms and ways of knowing that are specific to particular 'communities of practice' (Maynard, 2001, p.41). Sets of shared thoughts provide a common interpretative framework. Within the 'community of practice', news is relayed rapidly and knowledge readily made available to community members: *'When anybody came in to observe Diane, we'd always feed back straight away. You know, "This is the report and this is your copy", just so she (the mother) knew exactly how worried we were and what we were doing'*(T7).

The successful functioning of a knowledge-sharing 'community of practice' is impossible without a) the active participation and willingness of members to share knowledge and b) members willingness to use the 'community of practice' as a source of new knowledge (Ardichvili, Page and Wentling, 2002). Members are more willing to use the 'community of practice' as a source of knowledge if they trust other members to be a source of reliable and objective information. Trust first emerges on the basis of recurring social interactions and takes root as people get to know each other. This trust legitimizes membership of a particular 'community of practice' (see section 8.2, Q3, pp.214-217).

'Communities of practice' do not assume homogeneity of interests, contributions or viewpoints among members, neither are they self-contained entities but develop in larger contexts each with their own constraints. People take on a variety of roles within sometimes overlapping localised communities forging their identities through and within these communities. Both teachers and parents are potential members of communities which 'overlap and interact with others with continuity and discontinuity; contestation and co-operation; antagonism and attraction' (Heme, 2006, p.4). This multi-membership changes the various 'communities of practice' to which they belong. Schools are sites which operate as potential forums for the negotiation of different meanings, part of the complexity of social life, which arise amongst diverse populations. Interactions, whether tense or otherwise, are the lifeblood of learning communities. Practice can create boundaries which act as restraints restricting, inhibiting and mediating the establishment of partnerships (see pp. 158-9,163-164,171-2,196-197,221). Practice can also create bridges across boundaries. The negotiation of boundaries is contingent to all social situations where individuals move from, or between, one community and another.

As part of the search for resolutions to problems, different sources of advice and help may be approached. Engagement in practice can extend beyond the core practice of the group to include support from others interested in the community's maintenance such as, for example, a head teacher, an educational psychologist or a therapist. Some of these agents may function as brokers, introducing elements of one practice into another (Wenger, 1998, p.105). Brokers make new connections across different 'communities of practice', enabling coordination and opening new possibilities for meaning (Wenger, 1998, p.109). Brokering is one way in which disconnections can be bridged in an emergent, or developing 'community of practice'. Brokers utilise their multi-membership to co-ordinate and align perspectives among members who 'have different interests, make diverse contributions to activity and hold varied viewpoints' (Lave and Wenger, 1999, p.23).

Mutual or shared engagement in practices exemplified by regular interaction is a precondition for a 'community of practice'. Participation is not only about doing, it is about learning to be (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Wenger (1998) argues that

practice defines a community through the dimensions of mutual engagement, joint enterprise and a shared repertoire. Negotiations between parent, teacher and others can become a source of local coherence and cohesion, an agreement as to what to do and what not to do with the child giving cause for concern. The shared repertoire of practices which result gains coherence from the fact that it belongs to the practices of the 'community of practice'. When this is successful, both the parent and the teacher acquire the community's subjective viewpoint and learnt to speak its language: *'I actually feel that they ended up respecting us the same as we respected them.[...] I could tell them any worries and they wouldn't judge me* (P5). Parents and teachers acquire 'not explicit, formal "expert knowledge" but the embodied ability to behave as community members' (Brown and Duguid, 1991, p.48).

There is a sense of belonging and sharing in a collaborative engagement which is peculiar to the 'community of practice'. Joining a 'community of practice' means entering its internal configuration and its relationship with the rest of the world. Participators in a community develop an awareness of that community's practice and through their engagement come to understand, and adapt or transform as necessary, the artefacts, language, role definitions and implicit relations, tacit conventions, underlying assumptions and values (Handley et al., 2006, p.645). Whilst there is no requirement that a shared repertoire be completely locally produced, a noticeable lack of specific points of reference or local production of negotiable resources might well indicate that the grouping is other than a 'community of practice'. This raises the question as to whether in fact 'this is really something that the people involved in are doing together' (Wenger, 1998, p.126).

Wenger states that practice is the source of coherence of a community and that this practice has three dimensions. Firstly, members establish norms and relationships through mutual engagement as they interact with one another. This typically involves regular interaction which provide the basis for the relationships which make the 'community of practice' possible. Secondly, members are bound together by an understanding of a sense of joint enterprise. This is not just a stated shared goal, it is a process of negotiating and constituting an enterprise. Finally, members produce over time a shared repertoire of communal resources,

including, for example, language, routines, artifacts and stories (Roberts, 2006). These three essential characteristics of a 'community of practice', mutual engagement, a joint enterprise and a shared repertoire form the basis for the findings which follows. I began by reconfiguring the three characteristic dimensions of Wenger's model into 5 analytical categories: 'shared project'; 'shared repertoires'; 'negotiated meanings'; 'joint knowledge production' and 'overcoming constraints' as shown:

Table 7. Reconfiguring the field

Three characteristic dimensions of Wenger's model of a 'community of practice'	My analytic categories
Mutual engagement	Shared project
Negotiated enterprise	Negotiated meanings Overcoming constraints
Repertoire of negotiated resources	Shared repertoires Joint knowledge production

After reading and re-reading the transcripts and my analysis of them, I was able to isolate four essential dimensions contingent to the emergence or otherwise of a 'community of practice': the nature of the personal relationships, the degree of shared philosophy, the inclusive (or otherwise) ethos of the school, and the degree of support from others outside the dyad (such as, for example, the headteacher, or E.P.). These became the analytic categories 'unproblematic relationships'; 'shared philosophies'; 'inclusive schools' and 'isolated units'. Two further dimensions, the degree of 'pupil involvement' and the extent to which the child's needs were met were also relevant. These 11 categories represent the key features and/or parameters of the relationships between parents, teachers and schools under consideration in this thesis.²⁵

²⁵ The categorisation of these features functions as an analytical device for facilitating and enabling analysis and not as a means of negating the numerous paradoxes, fragments and fractures which characterise social life.

I then mapped the dyads according to these 11 analytic categories as shown in Table 8 below.

Table 8. Defining characteristics of the dyadic case studies

Defining Characteristics	Case study by name									
	Johnny	Adam	Billy	Judy	Alex	Diane	Alan	Julia	Conor	Michael
Shared project	x					x			x	x
Shared repertoires	x					x			x	x
Negotiated meanings	x								x	x
Joint knowledge production	x					x			x	x
Overcoming constraints						x			x	x
Unproblematic relationships	x			x				x	x	x
Shared philosophies	x								x	x
Inclusive schools									x	x
Isolated units	x				x					
Pupil involvement	x								x	x
Meeting children's needs						x		x	x	x

Notes:

1. Case study 5 (Peter) is omitted here because it served as the pilot study (see section 4.8.1.) and has different dimensions to the other dyads.
2. 'Unproblematic relationships', from the perspectives of both parent and teacher.
3. 'Meeting children's needs' depends upon the qualitative evaluation made by both parent and teacher. No objective measure was used to ascertain whether children's needs were being met.
4. 'Pupil involvement' refers to specific references made by parents and teachers about children's direct involvement in discussion about their needs and how they might be met, in other words, the pupil as an equal participant.
5. 'Inclusive school' refers to a whole school approach to social relations. The term 'inclusive school' designates a school community which does not segregate or isolate any individual member or groups of members.

The defining characteristics shown in Table 8 illustrate how parent-teacher relationships are the possibly fertile, possibly barren soil for the analysis of

structures and potential 'communities of practice'. Four relationships meet most, if not all, of the defining characteristics of a 'community of practice' although only three appear to be successful in meeting the educational needs of the children. Six of the parent-teacher relationships do not meet any of the criteria of a 'community of practice', although one, Julia (P8/T8), appears to be successfully meeting the pupil's needs.

8.5 Sketching a spectrum

My analysis identifies a spectrum of types of relationships which vary according to their potential to become transformed into, and sustain themselves as, working partnerships akin to 'communities of practice'. The theoretical framework that supports the recasting of the parent-teacher relationship as a potential 'community of practice' lies in the concept that learning is the social co-construction of knowledge. For the purpose of this analysis, participatory practice assumes the joint involvement of both parent and teacher in the mutual enterprise of constructing a communal knowledge base which will impact upon children experiencing difficulties in school.

In describing the spectrum, I utilise the ten variations of participatory practice, or versions of "working together", which I identified in response to Q5 (pp.223-225). However it would be more accurate to say that the relationships are "sketched" rather than "plotted" along a continuum because the relationships under discussion are dynamic, and pass through 'various stages of in-between-ness' (Corbett, 1997, p.56). At one extreme of the spectrum or continuum are established partnerships which fulfil the joint requirement of being both models of participatory practice and successful in meeting the needs of the pupils as evaluated by both parent and teacher. At the other extreme are relationships which appear to have little possibility of ever being successful parent-teacher partnerships from which children will benefit. In the middle lie the "in-betweens" or relationships which are not easily described as being either "established", "emergent", or "irreconcilable" as partnerships. These are the relationships which are empirical outliers, interesting exceptions to the rule, or offer potentially new dimensions to Wenger's idealised 'community of practice'.

One end of the spectrum is exemplified by three “success” stories or “established” partnerships. The first, Conor (P9/T9), is an example of the “networking” variant of working together which describes a sharing of repertoires, information and theories amongst a team who maintain constant contact and communication with each other. The “networking” mode relies upon a broker whose mission it is to form and sustain a network of people committed to participating in a learning culture where all contributions are equally valued and where different kinds of knowledge combine to inform each other. The relationship between Conor's mother and teacher (P9/T9) presents a clear picture of the emergence and evolution of a ‘community of practice’. Here we can see how, by adopting the role of an initiator and broker, Conor's mother becomes the acknowledged lynch pin in the forming and sustaining of a network of relationships. A site of knowledge production and shared practice results within which theories and ways of understanding are developed, negotiated and shared as part of a participatory knowledge construction process. The process is helped by the teacher's personal belief in practice being a process of acquiring and creating knowledge which is both based upon, and produces, shared points of reference. This valuing of shared learning extends to her pupils who she sees as active and equally participating subjects. An acceptance that awareness or knowledge is always partial, means that articulation, reflection and an exchange of ideas, is always necessary and to be welcomed. Parent and teacher both position themselves and are positioned as learners working together to construct and participate in a joint project. They participate jointly in a practice in which knowledge is an accumulated resource or shared commodity and competence is acquired, shared and extended. The result is a combination of different kinds of knowledges which inform each other and benefit the pupil.

(P7/T7, Diane) exemplifies both the “wait, see and monitor” and “networking” modes of working together. Diane's mother believes that she and her daughter's teachers have conflicting priorities and initially adopts the “wait, see and monitor” mode of working with the school: overcoming her misgivings, acquiescing to the teachers but remaining constantly vigilant. This unvoiced “agreement to differ” sustains the relationship through the potential conflict which accompanies divergent perspectives. A “networking” mode of working together develops in

which there is a three way dissemination of information between parent, teacher and pupil. This dissemination of information characterises the partnership between a parent and teacher who jointly negotiate a way forward in meeting the educational needs of a child who has serious and incontestable medical problems. Together parent and teacher sustain a relationship which permits conflicting priorities to be negotiated and overcome. This constant, on-going and meaningful communication characterises the shared enterprise. The third example of the “networking” mode can be seen in the account of Michael, a boy rescued from an apparently abusive father (P10/T10). The key element in the success of this parent-teacher relationship is the shared belief that each child is an individual pupil and that educational difficulties can be addressed with mutuality and reciprocity on both sides. Neither parent nor teacher indulge in problematising the family. With convergent personal philosophies, and shared priorities, parent, teacher and pupil are able to negotiate potential barriers and participate jointly in a mutual engagement which includes rather than rejects, both Michael and his mother.

In the centre of the continuum lie the “in-betweens” or relationships which can not easily be defined as “established”, “emergent”, or “irreconcilable” relationships. Two of these operate as isolated small units positioned within seemingly hostile surroundings. The first, Johnny (P1/T1), illustrates the “mutually supportive” variant of working together. The mutual consensus between parent and teacher that the child is experiencing difficulties is accompanied by both parent and teacher individually experiencing feelings of isolation and non-inclusive practices within the school. This parent-teacher partnership demonstrates mutual engagement and a negotiated enterprise. However, both mother and teacher experience non-inclusive practices and a deliberate resistance to the freeing up of boundaries within the school. This limits the effectiveness of the potential product of this partnership, namely, meeting the child’s needs. Both independently experience difficulties in acquiring a collective repertoire of negotiated resources. A lack of access to a greater fund of knowledge and expertise constrains the effectiveness of the partnership. Outside of her relationship with the children and their parents, the teacher works in isolation within a school which, according to her perception of it, does not

operate as a site for joint knowledge production. Within the school there is little, if any, opportunity for teachers to develop, negotiate and share theories and ways of understanding. This lack of shared discourse and ways of engaging in doing things together result in fewer benefits being accrued. The boundaries of the parent-teacher partnership and the potential for a productive 'community of practice', are constantly being constrained and compromised by the positioning of the relationship as a small unit within the bigger unit of the school.

The second "in-between", Alex (P6/T6), illustrates the "positive deception" variant of working together. In this relationship Alex's mother has to overcome the dilemmas of power relationships arising from her multi-membership of different communities. This she achieves by feigning compliance with the teacher. The deliberate use of apparent compliance is, tactically, a "necessary evil" for this mother who seeks to sustain the relationship in the hope that it will develop into a productive partnership. This is a parent-teacher relationship which is clearly defined as a small unit subject to the influences of a greater unit. There is evidence in the accounts of the micro-politics within the school which lead to both parent and teacher experiencing powerlessness and powerfulness in different ways. Both the homework strategy and special needs provision provide examples of how, when active involvement is denied, individuals, in this case Alex, become excluded from participating.

Two further relationships fall in the category of "in-betweens". The first, which illustrates the "benign ignorance" variant of working together, is a relationship which, at first view, appears unproblematic to both parent and teacher. However, under closer scrutiny it becomes apparent that the relationship is grounded in paradox. Judy (P4/T4), is a parent-teacher relationship which sustains itself, apparently unproblematically, solely through a lack of reciprocal communication of which neither parent nor teacher is aware. Claims to personal territory, in this case, the teacher's classroom, both create and inhibit the emergence of a 'community of practice'. There is, however, a restricted 'community of practice' type partnership created between the teacher and his pupils. It is restricted because it is marked by the apparent exclusion of parents. As such, it demonstrates the demarcations and contradictions of the bounded nature of community building, whereby the very boundaries which define the 'community of

practice' define the limits of participation and delineate both inclusive and exclusionary practices.

A second account, Julia (P8/T8), is another example of a "non-relationship" between parent and teacher which is unproblematic and appears to work to the advantage of the pupil. It would seem that the success of this relationship is dependant upon an unvoiced form of negotiation, a tacit acceptance and subtly disguised consensus between parent and teacher as to their individual but separate practices. In both cases extra support is available to the children, in Judy's case (P4/T4) from external tutors and in Julia's case (P8/T8) from the SENCo and from an external programme of support. Both dyads illustrate the "complementary" variant of working together in which strategic (alternative) resources are offered by the parent to the teacher. In neither case are these alternative resources automatically included in the teacher's practice. Both relationships lack evidence of a shared project or repertoire, joint knowledge production or negotiated meaning, the defining features of Wenger's 'community of practice'. Yet both relationships appear to be harmonious and unproblematic. In both cases the parents hold very strong beliefs as to the efficacy of their actions, decisions and choices. It seems therefore that it is the unerring belief held by parents, whether accurately or otherwise, as to their ability to contribute positively to the amelioration of their child's difficulties which is the important component or dynamic in sustaining and maintaining certain parent-teacher relationships. The above "exceptions to the rule" usefully expand the theoretical application of Wenger's "ideal" 'community of practice' to parent-teacher relationships.

The other end of the continuum is exemplified by relationships which have little possibility of ever being successful parent-teacher partnerships. The "antagonistic" variant of working together describes the relationship between two professionals, one of whom is the teacher and the other the parent. The antagonism arises when the parent has a greater wealth of insight, knowledge and experience of the child's problems than the child's teacher who has the authority and power to decide what happens. The "antagonistic" variant is illustrated by Adam (P2/T2). In this relationship, it is the parent who has the greater professional experience and knowledge of special educational needs.

This gives rise to a relationship between parent and teacher in which power relationships and multi-membership of communities impede opportunities for negotiating meaning. The relationship degenerates to the point where the common ground that exists between educational professionals becomes transformed into a site of irreconcilable disconnections which nullify any attempts at working in a partnership akin to a 'community of practice'. The account demonstrates that dual perspectives and roles are not automatically reconcilable or transformable into 'communities of practice' in which all contributions, including that of the child, are equally valued.

Billy (P3/T3) presents another example of a parent-teacher relationship which has irretrievably broken down resulting in flawed layers of relationships and influences. The mother in this case, constrained by home circumstances beyond her control, finds herself positioned as a "bad" mother in the eyes of the school. Parent and teacher have no shared understanding of 'what matters and what doesn't matter'. There is no possibility of negotiating the shared meanings which are an integral part of the informal 'communities of practice' formed when people pursue a shared enterprise over time, because the teacher opts instead to problematise the family and allocate blame. There appears to be no negotiable way forward and no flexible framework for including a pupil who does not readily fit the system. Billy's mother disputes the limiting function of the school to act as an effective context for her son's development but there is no available forum in which she can express her views. Without this, the teacher offers the child and his mother a restricted version of, and opportunity for, participation and engagement. This is the "restricted participation" variation of working together. Billy (P3/T3) is a parent-teacher relationship which exhibits the kinds of complexities, tensions and conflicts which result in dislocations preventing relationships from developing into effective partnerships. For Billy's mother, an experience of participation becomes an experience of non-participation and/or marginalisation. This reflects how boundaries of communities can be delineated, not simply as demarcations of 'in' or 'out' but as part of a complex social landscape. There are always opportunities for the crossing of boundaries and the experiencing of different forms of engagement, repertoires and enterprises. This requires a willingness on the part of teachers to engage with parents in a

shared practice which involves the constant fine tuning of the experience and competence jointly available. This relationship does not reap any of the potential reward of shared practice. There is no transformation of new insights into knowledge and no creation of a learning community of parents and teachers. The "restricted participation" mode of working together thwarts attempts for the development of effective partnerships.

The final example of apparently irreconcilable differences is to be found in the account of the mother in Alan (P7/T7) who seeks to secure appropriate provision for her two children who attend the same school. In her daughter's case an incontestable medical diagnosis provides the foundations for an effective partnership with the school. In her son's case, there is no consensus as to whether he has the kind of educational difficulties which have been identified by an independent educational psychologist. Without this initial consensus, the tone is set for a less than amicable relationship. The provision which she fights for is finally offered by the school but is subject to stringent "terms and conditions" which the family cannot meet. These terms are not negotiable and there is no space for dialogue. In this case, educational professionals construct different identities for this parent according to whether they deem her parental agency to be either appropriate or inappropriate. This positioning of parents by teachers is a key dynamic which impacts upon relationships and may underpin both the maximising and the minimising of the potential emergence of a 'community of practice', and thereafter the opportunity for meeting children's needs. This account demonstrates how variations in teacher attitudes and practices within the same school could lead to a child having a "good" year with one teacher followed by a "bad" year with another. Such variations across practices and attitudes indicate just how partial and fragile the "inclusive" school ethos can sometimes be. Alan's mother adopts the "compensatory" variant of working together with the school. The irreconcilable differences between herself and her son's teacher lead her to provide alternative and compensatory educational resources for her son. These resources are not however shared with the school.

8.6 Conclusion

The findings in this chapter illuminate the many different ways in which parents and teachers work together, or otherwise, in sorting out children's difficulties.

The spectrum of relationships range from relationships of non-participation, through relationships of restricted participation to the fully participatory practice which characterises a 'community of practice'. Some relationships are established partnerships which fulfil the joint requirement of being both models of participatory practice and successful in meeting the needs of the pupils as evaluated by both parent and teacher. Other relationships appear to have little possibility of ever being successful parent-teacher partnerships from which children will benefit. In the middle lie the "in-betweens" a collection of relationships which appear as outliers or exceptional cases when considered in relation to Wenger's idealised model of the 'community of practice'.

Answering my research questions has brought to the fore many of the tensional moments which adversely affect parent-teacher relationships and which jeopardise the establishment of working partnerships and by default, children's educational and life chances. My analysis of the dyadic case studies has shed light upon the articulation of parents' and teachers' knowledges and practices in the context of key constraints and highlights the need for the construction of a space in which to consider the structure of collaborative and productive partnerships based upon equality and mutuality grounded in the shared belief that all knowledge is partial.

From my analysis of this small number of cases, I have identified that the problems which test parent-teacher relationships to the point that they divert the focus of the agenda away from a shared meeting the needs of the child, are rooted in different perceptions of appropriate strategies, underpinned by different understandings of needs. This suggests that successful parent-teacher relationships require some form of negotiation of mutually agreed definitions which could draw upon the additional advice, information, knowledge or expertise offered by parents to schools which constitutes an additional contribution to the communal bank of knowledge or expertise deployed by teachers.

This chapter builds upon and extends the understanding of the role played by the pro-active, knowledge embracing parent which emerges initially from my analysis of the preliminary study. The accessing by parents of the knowledge base traditionally held by educational professionals changes the dynamics of the

relationship between school and parents. The discussion then turns to the role of the pro-active, knowledge embracing parent in parent-teacher partnerships and 'community of practice' building in the SEN context. This raises issues about how expertise, authority and power dynamics are elements in the struggle to establish effective 'communities of practice'. The processes of liaison and negotiation, whether between teacher and parent or between teacher and teacher, are under researched and remain a largely invisible area. It is apparent, however, that relationships between parents and teachers change as both seek to accommodate each other within an official discourse of partnership which repositions them in relation to pedagogical practices. Parent-teacher interactions change as negotiations of meanings, an important factor in professional behaviour, are entered into as part of a process of attempting to reach a mutually agreed understanding of the nature and management of children's difficulties. The illustration and summary of the key findings in this chapter precedes the concluding discussion in Chapter 9 which integrates what has been achieved by this study.

Chapter 9. Conclusions

9.1 Introduction

This final chapter begins by outlining the contributions of the research. This is followed by a review of the strengths and weaknesses of Wenger's 'community of practice' theory and a consideration of it as a potential "mechanism for change" with implications for practice. The chapter concludes with a discussion about the limitations of the empirical work, proposals for future research, a reflection upon inclusion and a Post Script.

9.2 Contributions of the research

Linking children's educational difficulties, the duty of care, parent-teacher relationships and the 'community of practice' theory is a new area of research not represented in the extant literature. This previously unexplored terrain produces new empirical findings which form the launch pad for a range of follow up studies. The research widens the breadth and applicability of Wenger's 'community of practice' theory with potential implications for the construction of partnerships which benefit parents, teachers and pupils.

My first and arguably most original contribution to the field of existing knowledge lies in the opening up of a new research area. In the first chapter of this thesis I describe how the judgement handed down on the 23rd September 1997 highlighted many issues which had long exercised my thoughts. Linking the duty of care to the giving of advice is a new and significant departure and one with consequences for the construction of effective parent-teacher partnerships. The judgement draws into focus two significant issues namely how conceptualisations of special educational needs and the dynamics of interactions between environments impact upon a child's progress through school. Parents, acting as agents for their children, have to make informed choices and decisions often based upon professional recommendations and advice given verbally. The giving of advice by teachers to parents constitutes part of the teacher's duty of care. Its consideration as a new dynamic in the construction of effective parent-teacher partnerships is the first original contribution of this thesis.

The second contribution of this research is its identification of pro-active and knowledge embracing parents who seek to participate in 'community of practice' building in the SEN context. Parent-teacher relationships are neither linear nor the same for everyone and the research identifies ten modes or variations in the ways in which parent and teachers work together, some more successfully than others. This provides further empirical evidence which reminds us that differences in personality, situation, motivation and context give individual shape to each parent-teacher relationship, providing an important contribution to the existing literature on inclusive, participatory frameworks in educational settings. The establishment of equitable parent-teacher partnerships remains a very tense, and difficult to achieve area of educational practice. The research explores the complex problematics which undermine the rhetoric expressed in educational policy documents in relation to the establishment and maintenance of co-operative practices. The findings have implications for policy makers who present parents, teachers and children as uniform groups rather than as individuals each with their own specific and personal biography because the atypicality of parents and teachers contributes to the 'complex regimes of inclusion and exclusion colluding and colliding with each other' (Allan, 1999, p.viii) within schools.

The third contribution of this thesis lies in the new knowledge it reveals about a largely invisible and under researched area, namely, the nature of liaison and negotiation between parents, teachers and children. My analysis suggests that relationships between parents and teachers who succeed in working together to sort out children's difficulties demonstrate mechanisms which allow for joint meaning-making and continuity of agreed strategies. Although occasionally simply the result of benign ignorance, these mechanisms are more usually characterised by sharing, honesty, open relationships, open communication lines, inclusive practices and mutual respect. My findings also suggest that both the practice of 'brokering' and a shared philosophy are conducive to establishing partnerships constitutive of a 'community of practice' and that such partnerships have within them the potential to address and overcome the problematics of status and power which undermine so many professional-lay relationships.

My fourth contribution is methodological. The backcloth to this research is a complex, often contradictory range of personal and social values, dilemmas, political, theoretical and ethical issues which problematize both special educational needs and partnership issues. Competing and contradictory policy discourses include a humanitarian policy discourse of inclusion, a focus on raising academic standards, the normalisation of academic achievement and provision for commonality and difference. These alternative social, political and educational interests give rise to unresolved tensions characteristic of the inherently tensional nature of all collective social practices. The dyadic approach in this thesis to the data collection and analysis provides a unique lens through which to view the dynamics of mutuality and reciprocity between individuals involved in a collective social practice of a potentially conflictive and contradictory nature. Equal attention is paid to the perspectives and interests of both parents and teachers who, if they are to succeed in negotiating meaningful and mutual understandings in the best interests of the children, have to reconcile conceptual uncertainties if they are to reach a working compromise. It sometimes seems as though the politicisation of education produces dominant educational discourses whose tendency is to prioritise some voices over others. In a dyadic study research participants oscillate between being the subjects of their own accounts and the objects of the accounts given by their "dyadic partners". A dyadic methodology, although rarely a feature in educational research, affords a unique opportunity for "both parties" to participate equally in an area of research in which both are implicated. The double perspective upon parent-teacher relationships which is required gives voice to the experiences and perceptions of those most directly concerned. This opens up a space for analysing and realistically accounting for the role played by negotiation among people who may not only have different values, ideas and understandings of "what matters" and what is considered desirable, but where several interests are at stake, including, most importantly, that of the child.

Although the dyadic approach pays equal attention to the roles of both parents and teachers in their dialogues, my analysis may suggest an implicitly parental standpoint in the interpretation of the data. The implication of the findings of the analysis, which is that some parents can be disadvantaged in relation to schools

and teachers, may have been influenced by my professional experience of working in the SEN field in an independent capacity. This privileged position has permitted me the time to view, reflect upon and ponder about parent-teacher relationships in a way that many teachers in school may not be able to do. I have been able to view, at close quarters, the huge amount of time and effort that parents, and particularly mothers, invest in their quest to establish and maintain a network of relationships which will allow them to participate equally in knowledge-sharing situations indicative of a 'community of practice'. Alternative interpretations of data are, of course, always possible and it is worth stating that although I have chosen to employ a dyadic approach aiming to give equal weight to both participants, it may well be the case that the insights which I have gained in my professional life are reflected in the conclusions to this thesis. My intention, as evidenced at the outset by the wording of the research questions, was not to deliberately set up 'a parental standpoint analysis'. Given this, it would perhaps have been prudent, in hindsight, to have incorporated a mechanism such as a reliability check on plausibility during the data analysis stage. This may well have helped to lessen any potential bias from unintentionally creeping into the analysis.

The fifth contribution of this research relates to Wenger's theoretical 'community of practice'. This serves as an analytical template for understanding the dynamics of partnership within a social theory of learning which sees learning as an expression of social participation. This thesis contributes to an extensive literature which examines the nature of 'communities of practice' of various sizes, in different sectors and in a variety of socio-cultural contexts. Locating the theory in parent-teacher relationships has added to the exploration of appropriate contexts for the application of the 'community of practice' theory, whose approach to knowledge management and transfer in social contexts, is still evolving. As the theory is applied in different contexts, so the strengths and weaknesses of the approach become better understood.

9.3 Overview of the 'community of practice' theory

In my analysis I chose to draw heuristically upon Lave and Wenger's theory of a 'community of practice' because it centres upon the co-production of the social world by people as they constitute their relationships. The theory has

increasingly become an influential framework for understanding learning and identity formation across a wide variety of contexts including professional and vocational communities and non-institutional informal learning networks. However, many who have used the theory to understand learning in different contexts have done so with reservations and have encountered difficulties with its transference across contexts. Theorising learning as social practice is both illuminating and limiting. Transporting and using parts of a theoretical framework can be a risky procedure if the process is not problematised in relation to the context of its production.

Wenger's work has much to offer to those involved in the management of organisations where people learn their trade by gradually becoming fully participating members of an existing 'community of practice' and acquire cultural practices in the context of the practice itself. It is important to take this into account when harnessing the 'community of practice' perspective to parents and teachers because of the similarities and differences between work-place productive relationships and parent-teacher relationships. The positioning of employee and employer differs from that of parents and teachers whose relationships are a) assigned rather than chosen, b) constantly being mediated in relation to the perceived needs of the child, and c) subject to different expectations, values and emphasis, especially because teachers and parents may not share the same understandings of their roles and spheres of responsibility (Katz, 1984). The motivation, goals, participants, methods and outcomes may not be the same within organisations such as businesses, as they are in educational contexts.

Within this thesis, the 'community of practice' framework assumes the joint involvement of both parent and teacher in the mutual enterprise of constructing a communal knowledge base, built with the hope of improving the learning possibilities and life chances for the child experiencing difficulties at school. The parent-teacher relationships described in detail in the empirical work of this thesis become the possibly fertile soil for the identification of structures, or potential 'communities of practice', akin to the following:

...participation at multiple levels is entailed in membership in a

community of practice. [...] It does imply participation in an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities. [...] A community of practice is a set of relations among persons, activity and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1999, pp.23-24, original italics).

The theoretical framework that supports the recasting of the parent-teacher relationship as a potential 'community of practice' lies in the concept that learning is the social co-construction of knowledge. This co-construction of knowledge marries the interactional level, (that is the relationship that learners have both with each other and with those more knowledgeable than themselves), with the 'community of practice' as a site for the formation of knowledge, and includes the mechanisms for arriving at these formulations, and the validating processes involved (Rogoff, 1995; McCormick and Paechter, 1999, p.xi). This essentially constructivist approach brings the mutuality and interconnectedness of learners, learning and knowledge to the foreground.

The 'community of practice' approach asserts that learning is best understood as participation in social practices situated in particular contexts which are socially and culturally legitimated by those who engage in and develop particular practices (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The phrase 'legitimate peripheral participation', originally coined to point to the character of the process of becoming, has come into common currency in accounts of learning and participation in many diverse settings (see also 3.4). The phrase suggests that participation must be socially legitimated and that a trajectory of participation facilitates a move from being at the fringes of a community to engaging in more centralised performances in that community. The heterogeneous, multifocal character of situated practice in which people who constitute a "situation" together, know different things and speak with different interests and experience is explicitly acknowledged (Lave, 1993). However, describing individuals with different knowledges, interests and experience in terms of a 'sense of trajectory' is, perhaps, less than satisfactory (Lineham and McCarthy, 2000). Understanding legitimate peripheral participation as a trajectory or movement from newcomer to old timer is clearly redundant within a small community of two or three members. Likewise it makes no sense when applied to a group of teachers who are all established "old-timers" (see

Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2003, p.16). This suggests that legitimate peripheral participation is not a necessary or dominant component within a 'community of practice', unless it is to continually define part or all of its boundary.

Distilled within the phrase 'legitimate peripheral participation' is an understanding of how operation of power fosters or impedes access to, and continuing membership of, 'communities of practice' (Contu and Willmott, 2003). Roberts argues that the role of power, 'the ability or capacity to achieve something, whether by influence, force, or control' has to be recognised (Roberts, 2006, pp. 626-627). Lave and Wenger do invite a closer and more systematic examination of how power relations mediate the acquisition, maintenance, and transformation of meanings, including what is deemed "legitimate". However, when it comes to illustrating their thinking by reference to the practices of midwives, tailors, quartermasters, butchers, and non-drinking alcoholics, connections between the practices of "community" members and the "structural characteristics" of these communities are left largely unexplored (Contu and Willmott, 2003, p.286). The 'communities of practice' that I am considering potentially include members who have varying standings, experience, expertise, age, personality and authority within schools. It may be that degrees of participation are affected by power relations with those who have full participation wielding more power in the negotiation of meaning (Handley et al., 2006). The failure to explore the implications of the distribution of power might suggest that Lave and Wenger's account of the negotiation of meaning can be misinterpreted as 'excessively quiescent and consensual', while, in reality, such activities are plagued by misunderstandings and disagreements (Marshall and Rollinson, 2004, p.574), as my data illustrates. Within hierarchical organizational structures, such as schools, where power is relatively formal and centralized, negotiation may be limited to key figures of authority within the organization. Here, the voices of some of the members of a community may be somewhat muted (see Johnny (P1/T1) pp.156-159, Adam P2/T2 pp.159-164, Billy P3/T3 pp.164-172).

Power shapes social interaction, and perceptions concerning its use will influence the degree of trust among those engaged in knowledge transfer (Roberts, 2000) (see pp. 179-180, 196-197, 222, 241). The presence of a relationship of trust indicates an ability to share a high degree of mutual

understanding built upon a common appreciation of a shared social and cultural context. Trust, familiarity and mutual understanding, developed in their social and cultural contexts, are prerequisites for the successful transfer of tacit knowledge (Roberts, 2000). Indeed, empirical evidence suggests that trust leads to higher levels of openness between co-operative partnerships, thereby facilitating effective knowledge transfer (Wathne, Roos and von Krogh, 1996). This is confirmed by my answer to Q3, pp.214-217.

Contu and Willmott (2003), referring to Lave and Wenger's 'embryonic appreciation of power relations' argue that situated learning theory encourages a focus upon the embeddedness of learning processes in relations of power (Contu and Willmott, 2003, p.283). In their view, situated learning theory presents an opportunity whilst posing a challenge, to established theories of learning. Contu and Willmott critique the popularization of Lave and Wenger's thinking and argue that in their original formulation of situated learning theory, some radical elements are 'underdeveloped and neglected in their illustrations of learning practices' (Contu and Willmott, 2003, p.284). They argue that 'popularized versions of situated learning tend to ignore or suppress Wenger's 1991 understanding that learning processes are integral to the exercise of power and control, rather than external or unrelated to the operation of power relations' (Contu and Willmott, 2003, pp.283-4). They contend that the adoption and popularisation of Lave and Wenger's ideas has led to its 'dilution and selective adoption' (Contu and Willmott, 2003, p.284).

How adequately Lave and Wenger conceptualize power, and whether they adequately incorporate their understanding of power into the analysis of learning as a situated practice provides scope for further debate. There seems little basis for doubting, however, that "power" is pivotal to their analysis (see for example Lave and Wenger 1991, pp. 36, 64, 98; Wenger, 1998, pp. 15, 80, 189-91, 207-8, 227, 284) and is incorporated directly into their very definition of a 'community of practice' (see p.264).

Some commentators incorrectly assume the community of practice to be a stable entity, with the trajectory from outside to "core" practice describable in terms of changing practices as a process of 'enculturation' takes place (Lee and Roth, 2003,

paragraph 1). This however, is inconsistent with the cultural-historic theory developed by Leontev 1978 in which legitimate peripheral participation is grounded. Here the relationship between a subject and a collective is defined as dialectical, that is, in tension, possibly even contradictory, yet mutually constitutive. However, because no strict dichotomy exists between “peripheral” and “full” participation, participation and learning trajectories can take several forms (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Lave argues that confusion over the meaning of situated learning and, more generally, situated activity results from different interpretations of the concept (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.32). Legitimate peripheral participation functions

‘as a descriptor of engagement in social practice that entails learning as an integral constituent.[...]The form that the legitimacy of participation takes is a defining characteristic of ways of belonging, and is therefore not only a crucial condition for learning, but a constitutive element of its content.[...] Peripherality suggests that there are multiple, varied, more- and less-engaged and -inclusive ways of being located in the fields of participation defined by a community’ (Lave and Wenger, 1991, pp.35-36).

The terminology ‘full participation’ is intended to designate the diversity of relations involved in varying forms of community membership. In so doing, it ‘places the emphasis on what partial participation is not, or not yet’ (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.37). Peripherality is a dynamic concept; a positive term suggesting an opening or a way of gaining access to sources for understanding through growing involvement. Furthermore, ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ presents an analytical viewpoint on learning which takes place ‘no matter which educational form provides a context for learning, or whether there is any intentional educational form at all’ (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.40). ‘Legitimate peripheral participation’ is not a method of education but an:

analytical category or tool for understanding learning across different methods, different historical periods, and different social and physical environments. It attempts to account for learning, not teaching or instruction. Thus this approach escapes problems that arise through examinations of learning from pedagogy's viewpoints. It makes the conditions of learning, rather than just abstract subject matter, central to understanding what is learned (Brown and Duguid, 1991 p.48).

I have used the ‘community of practice’ approach as an heuristic analytical frame in order to illuminate and better understand the nature of interaction and learning

between parents and teachers. The model is based upon a metaphor of apprenticeship. However, parent-teacher relationships are not apprenticeships and theorising learning from successful apprenticeship models does not unproblematically illuminate or explain the learning which takes place between parents and teachers jointly involved in understanding and providing for children giving cause for concern. Clearly the trajectory of participation of the parent cannot be described in terms of seeking to become a teacher, nor the teacher's trajectory of seeking to become a parent. A more accurate description would be that participation for both is not only about doing but is about learning to be (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Indeed some argue that the central issue, in respect of workplace learning, is '*becoming a practitioner and not learning about practice*' (Brown and Duguid, 1991, p.48, original italics).

Parent-teacher partnerships are small, self-constituting communities which, perhaps, have the advantage of evading 'the ossifying tendencies of large organisations' (Brown and Duguid, 1991, p.50). The actual behaviours of these 'communities of practices' are open to frequent changing either because newcomers, such as therapists, are introduced or because the demands of practice force the community to revise its relationship to its environment. Gaps between espoused and actual practice can become large and difficult to close, yet, according to Brown and Duguid, (1991) these gaps must be closed if working, learning and innovation are to be fostered. This process of development is inherently innovative and involves acknowledging, legitimising and supporting activities perpetrated by members of the wider community, allowing communities of practice some 'latitude to shake themselves free of perceived wisdom' (Brown and Duguid, 1991, p.53).

When Lave and Wenger looked at the means by which novice tailors became 'master-tailors' they were looking at a process where learning is part of the practice, and, in the main, secondary to the tailoring tasks at hand (Adler, 1998). Arguably, as with any 'community of practice', this process includes learning to conform to the practices of the community or risk having the legitimacy to participate withdrawn. In a 'community of practice' the community develops and is constituted around the existence of a joint enterprise. My initial uncertainty as to what constituted a joint project and the degree of flexibility within the theory led

me, at an early stage of the research, to contact Etienne Wenger with my thoughts (private correspondence, November 2002). His view was that the question as to which relationships could be called 'communities of practice' or not was a pragmatic rather than semantic one, the key issue being insight generation: 'Viewing any group as a community of practice implies focussing on the domain of the community and the characteristics that allow it to function as a structure of meaning, knowledge and culture creation'. I explained my belief that for children with special educational needs, learning, meaning-making, knowledge production and identity have particular implications, hence my intention to search the data for examples of mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire. To this he responded as follows: 'This is a very interesting approach with all kinds of peripheralities worth exploring, not least the child's but also other services. This seems very promising'. Boylan (undated) distinguishes between the 'analytic perspective' (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.40) and the sociological description of forms of participation and the nature of groupings which emerge through the evolution of social practices (Boylan, p.2 undated). I read Wenger's response to my enquiry as an endorsement of the latter which confirmed to me that the 'community of practice' approach does indeed have sufficient flexibility in its analytic constructs for it to encompass the special kind of parent-teacher relationship under discussion in this thesis. The insights generated are new and have potential application for all parents and teachers concerned with meeting children's needs. It may be that the 'community of practice' theory functions as a metaphor or analytic frame that can be moved as view points, or areas of focus shift, rather than an ontological category (Boylan, undated). It may also be the case that the 'community of practice' is not the only form in which learning in and through practice occurs (See section 3.4).

Parents and teachers are two groups who form part of the discourse community of "educators". However, their day to day identities are as part of narrower groups with different public "functions". Conflicts can arise when teachers expectation of parental compliance comes up against parents' historically constructed practices of parenting, and their understanding of their role. Boundary events provide opportunity for boundary practices, the beginnings of mutual engagement and perhaps a starting point for a joint enterprise. Parents'

evenings are one example of boundary events where 'dialogue and interaction are possible, power relations are played out and alliances formed' (Herne, 2006, p.5). Given time this (work of) connection can become a practice in its own right providing a medium for new 'communities of practice'. The emergent 'community of practice' can be the conduit for external and innovative views resulting from harnessing different energies resulting in alternative interpretations and potentialities.

One defining characteristic of a 'community of practice' is its potential to resolve the problem of assumptions and stereotyping since there is no assumption of an homogeneity of interests, contributions or viewpoints among members. It is a self-contained entity which develops in larger contexts each with their own constraints (Wenger, 1998, p.90). The 'community of practice', as a community of learners involved in interpretation, reflection and the forming of meaning, is a site of cultural transformation in which all participants are potential beneficiaries. The interchange of ideas, and negotiation of meaning through active engagement with each other is as much part of the process of problem-solving as it is of diluting the effects of the power relationships, politics and competing priorities which characterise social situations. Accepting a parent into a community of teachers, like becoming and belonging, is not necessarily an easy project or undertaking. It is a process which is fraught with struggle since it involves the transformation of the community of teachers. Critical inquiry into practice forces practitioners to move into the centre of their doubts (Schon, 1987) sometimes resulting in a reframing, of personal understandings of role and professional relationships. Better informed parents can create new demands upon teachers which may result in changes to their practice. The process of existing community members learning from skilled newcomers is not covered by Lave and Wenger's theory (Fuller et al., 2005). Educational professionals may have to question the adequacy of their knowledge traditions, and be able (and willing) to deconstruct and reconstruct their knowledge, practices and discourses. This may require a 'specific effort to suspend (and/or contest) authority relationships and the authoritative interpretive judgements which sustain them' (Winter, 1991, p.478). How teachers and parents develop in such circumstances is a dimension of their joint practice, creating new opportunities for mutual engagement

Our experience and our membership inform each other, lull each other, transform each other. We create ways of participating in a practice in the very process of contributing to making the practice what it is (Wenger, 1998, p.96).

Conflict which ends in reconciliation and the production of a plan of action concerning the child which is acceptable to both parent and teacher is the work of the parent-teacher 'community of practice'.

Arguably, there are few relationships between parents and teachers which are as intense as those which revolve around children experiencing difficulties, and which would benefit more from complementary contributions. Interpersonal relationships between parents and teachers are diverse and complex, laden with emotions. For parents and/or teachers who participate and belong to several different 'communities of practice', 'reconciliation' work (Wenger, 1998) and ongoing effort is needed to bring coherence to a self which has multiple, sometimes conflicting roles. Membership of multiple communities and the resultant negotiation of rival allegiances is a 'high tension zone' which carries with it an experience 'at once heterogeneous, split apart, multiple [...] a self unified only through action, work and the patchwork of collective biography' (Star, 1991, p.29). To be able to learn from conflicts and to deal with contradictions requires openness to cogenerative dialoguing (Roth and Tobin, 2002), a practice base upon the affordances that collective activity brings to the understanding and explaining of contradictions. 'Cogenerative dialoguing is aimed at expanding the range of actions available to each participant, who can then do his/her part to improve the situation' (Lee and Roth, 2003, paragraph 64).

The process of mutual engagement requires that each participant makes an investment in negotiating the relationship. Because this investment is so closely linked to defining and sustaining identities it can be destabilizing, leading to modified forms of participation and discontinuities between participants. According to Keyes, the development of "good" partnerships, defined by the author as characterised by the absence of conflict, depends upon the fit between parental cares and concerns and those of the teacher (Keyes, 2002, p.179). Parental involvement, however, is not a 'given', but a political construct which involves micro-political negotiations (Bowe, Gerwitz and Ball, 1994, p.64).

The transformation of the parent-teacher relationship into a partnership akin to a 'community of practice' requires modification, motivation, and a willingness to negotiate. Embracing struggle and negotiation as part of the entry into a 'community of practice' involves transformation and the surrendering of notions of control and power. It moves the individual away from 'exclusive identification with a certain identity and instead focus(es) on the process of becoming, of negotiating our participation across the many communities we traverse [...] conflicts yield to new creations, identities and possibilities' (Lee and Roth, 2003, paragraph 53).

This section has provided an overview of the strengths and limitations of Lave and Wenger's 'communities of practice' as a theoretical framework and considered its applicability to the parent-teacher relationship. I turn next to a discussion of the framework as a mechanism for change.

9.4 A mechanism for change?

Theoretically, a 'community of practice' offers members the possibility of changing, or adapting, their existing frames of reference, assumptions and theories. It functions as a context and mechanism for change, a way of arriving at a place where we can recognise 'what we do and what we know, as well as on our ability to connect meaningfully to what we don't do and don't know – that is, to the contributions and knowledge of others' (Wenger, 1998, p.76).

Schools and education authorities contain multiple constellations of 'communities of practice'. All practices are embedded within, and influenced by, organisational processes such as rules and policies. Schools for example, currently have to juggle the standards and inclusion agendas and teachers have to work within constraints which are indicative of the inherent tensions and ambiguous nature which characterise all collective social practice. Constraints interact in complex patterns which affect and sometimes limit the opportunity for reflective practice, reducing the opportunity for the emergence of wider 'communities of practice'.

The 'community of practice' allows for a 'synergistic collaboration rather than a conflicting separation' (Brown and Duguid, 1991, p.55). However, attempts to systematically foster such synergy through a conceptual reorganisation might produce difficulties within schools where:

work and learning are set out in formal descriptions so that people (and organisations) can be held accountable; groups are organised to define responsibility; organisations are bounded to enhance concepts of competition; peripheries are closed off to maintain secrecy and privacy (Brown and Duguid, 1991, p.55).

Different kinds of pedagogic knowledges need to be recognised and acknowledged. Sites, for example schools, which privilege certain forms of knowledge and perspectives over others decrease the possibilities for negotiating meanings through co-participation. This can make full participation, that is engagement with all the resources of the community and the potential for full participation in its social relations, more difficult and lead to discontinuities which thwart the emergence of new elements in the repertoire of practices, opportunities and relationships. As a result, parents, teachers and children may be restricted and/or excluded from contributing to a collective production of meaning reached through a process of negotiation requiring sustained attention, continuous interaction and continual readjustment.

I have already referred to the incorrect assumption that the community of practice is a stable entity, with the trajectory from outside to "core" practice describable in terms of changing practices as a process of 'enculturation' takes place (Lee and Roth, 2003, paragraph 1). It may be that parents and teachers are indeed involved in a trajectory but that the trajectory is better portrayed as a journey of legitimisation whereby being validated as a "good" or "successful" parent or teacher becomes a pre-requisite for being accepted in a 'community of practice' of both parents and teachers. In this case before parents can be considered as legitimate participants they will need to give a 'competent and convincing performance of a particular role' (Paechter, 2003b, p.74). Billy (P3/T3) provides a graphic account of the restricted participation that results when a parent is not validated as a "good parent" and full participation depends upon an acceptable, socially embedded performance (Paechter, 2003a, p.542). The data used to answer Q6 (section 8.2, pp. 225-229) suggests that a "vetting process" takes place by teachers of the potential value of parental information and that the process of negotiation is partly dependent upon individual understandings of "good" pedagogic practice.

In chapter 6 I have shown how the resolution of a child's difficulties is a powerful motivator which leads parents to embark upon a journey characterised by inquiry and the gathering of information, and that the motivation for parental agency is always mediated by the needs of the child. Herein lies, from my perspective, one limitation of the theory which is that the motivational element inherent in the establishing and maintaining of a 'community of practice' has generally been overlooked in the literature and is underdeveloped in Wenger's work. One of the critical factors determining the success or failure of a community is its members' motivation to actively participate in community knowledge generation and sharing activities. The reasons why individual teachers and/or parents decide to actively participate or not participate in knowledge-sharing communities of practice are currently not well understood. One of the products of the present study is to contribute to understanding the factors which determine the success of knowledge-sharing 'communities of practice' by exploring the reasons why members are active, or inactive, participants.

Wenger's 'community of practice' framework is useful because of the particular meaning he gives to practice which he describes in terms of those things that individuals within a community do to further a set of shared goals, drawing on available resources. Wenger describes how external influences are 'mediated by the communities in which their meanings are negotiated in practice' (Wenger, 1998, p.85) and this negotiation of meaning takes place between individuals as they attempt to make sense of tensions and contradictions. The engagement in a joint construction of meaning, implies that established understandings and practices can be called into question, perhaps ultimately to be changed (Ainscow, Booth and Dyson, 2006, p.302). Ainscow refers to anomalies 'which disturb and cannot be accommodated within existing frames of reference' (Ainscow, Booth and Dyson, 2006, p.303) and questions how some teachers and schools are able to respond to anomalies by rethinking their understanding and reconstituting their practices. He concludes that the answer to this lies partly in the attitudes and values of those who make up the 'community of practice' and, in particular, of those head teachers 'who can exercise positional power and other forms of influence on those attitudes and values' (Ainscow, Booth and Dyson, 2006, p.304). This therefore becomes a process of disturbance which offers a mechanism for change and

development. However, 'anomalies do not simply present themselves, but have to be recognised as such' (Ainscow, Booth and Dyson, 2006, p.303). Alex (P6-T6, pp.176-180) provides a good example of one such anomaly whereby what Ainscow refers to as a 'lack of fit' (Ainscow, Booth and Dyson, 2006, p.304) becomes apparent between established pedagogic practice and the response of the pupil.

One of the key factors which affects responses to anomalies is the attitude of teachers and headteachers and their willingness to be reflective and open questions up. This is the territory of the 'community of practice' where processes of meaning-making in the context of the community are at work. The negotiation of meaning, a dynamic productive process entailing interpretation and action, 'constantly changes the situations to which it gives meaning and affects all participants' (Wenger, 1998, p.54). The pupil, as an active participant, can also have a significant contribution to make, both to teacher expertise, and to negotiations around the meaning of being a learner. This space for the negotiation of meaning is particularly important for pupils because it allows them the possibility of becoming active members, rather than passive recipients, in their own learning.

Effective partnerships do not simply or spontaneously happen of their own accord. Various issues operate to limit or block and exclude the informed and willing engagement of both educators and parents and families alike (Macgregor, 2006, p.3). Many of these issues were cited by Hargreaves (1999) whose analysis shows that the extent to which parents and educators interpret and come at issues from different perspectives and motivations often leads to a collision course because:

An engagement and partnership process cannot be imposed from outside the community, nor based upon a deficit model or mindset, in which partnership remains an academic set of concepts and premises, with external authority figures talking down to parents and families and telling them how they should think, feel and behave. The process is necessarily an interactive one, which encourages participative access and ownership among the parties themselves, in terms that are directly relevant to them and their community' (Macgregor, 2006, p.4).

Social theories of learning, which refer to learning in social settings, have the potential to illuminate previously unvoiced forms of social knowledge and offer a way forward so that currently 'disqualified knowledge' (Foucault, 1980, p.82) may

have a role in the redefinition of practices, discourses and personal or public agendas. Wenger's work offers a theoretical framework for participatory practice with potential benefits for understanding and providing educationally for children giving cause for concern. Participation 'permits individuals or groups to influence decisions that would otherwise be arbitrarily imposed on them' (Giddens, 1991, p.212). It is the contextual interrelationship between learning, meaning-making, knowledge production and identity which can impact upon children experiencing difficulties in school and their families. For the child to benefit from the practice of their parents and teachers there needs to be a transparency within and among relationships which encourages participation, expanded learning and complementary contributions.

For Lave and Wenger, motivation, identity, conflict and relations all act to shape the 'community of practice' and work in different ways within it to constrain or encourage participation. Participation allows for experiences to be shared between more and less experienced members. This is a process which by itself can begin to overcome the underlying power relations, reproduced and recognizable in processes and practices which can compromise the fine-tuning of experience and competence. In other words, the 'community of practice' is a site within which inequalities in relationships can be successfully negotiated 'in the context of this process of mutual recognition' (Wenger, 1998, p.56). It may be that what Wenger calls 'the negotiation of a joint enterprise' is crucial to preventing relationships from breaking down completely, or put another way, is crucial in keeping a community together.

The interchange of ideas, and negotiation of meaning through active engagement both acknowledges and allows for tensions. This is as much a part of the process of problem-solving, as it is of diluting the effects of the power relationships, politics and competing priorities which characterise social situations. It can be difficult to challenge the distribution of authority, and negotiate constraints 'the structures, rules and procedures, exclusions and oppositions which control and restrain what can and what cannot be said, which seek to shape meaning and to represent the 'normal' (Haw, 1996, p.324). The privileging of certain forms of knowledgeability and perspectives decreases the possibilities for negotiating meanings. This can result in discontinuities which

thwart the extension of repertoires of practices, opportunities and relationships. Discontinuities can result in parents, teachers or children being restricted and/or excluded from contributing to a collective production of meaning reached through a process of negotiation requiring sustained attention, continuous interaction and continual readjustment. Lave and Wenger's theorising shifts the focus away from the theory/practice dichotomy and encourages an examination of the possible effects of resources made available in different contexts. Resources for learning can enable or exclude. Depending on how they are used, resources can enable access to the practice or alienate participants (Adler, 1998).

The 'community of practice' can function as a mechanism for change. By allowing experiences to be shared by more or less experienced members, it offers the possibility of increased participation and the changing of existing beliefs and assumptions. I turn now to explore the implications for practice of a site within which inequalities in relationships can be successfully negotiated.

9.5 Implications for practice

Although developed as an explanatory tool to understand learning, the 'community of practice' framework is also taken as a tool for changing practice: 'If learning takes place in communities of practice then it is a natural step to attempt to foster or support the development of such communities' (Boylan, undated p.1). The discussion of issues of power and trust show that a 'community of practice' does not develop and function in a vacuum. The context within which it is embedded is a major factor determining its success or otherwise as a means of creating and transferring knowledge. The adoption of such communities requires active engagement by all members of the school community in a form of participatory democracy that focuses on process as well as outcome. The democratic process involved allows for, and fosters, fluidity and change in order that the social practices of the community be shaped by all of its members. Moving towards more democratic practices requires a willingness to respect and listen to others. This process, however, is frequently hampered by dilemmas arising from embedded relationships of power in current educational settings and a lack of sense of collective responsibility. Whilst asymmetrical relations of power exist in schools these dilemmas will have no easy solutions. If improving the amount and quality of participation within the school community lies at the heart

of policy and policy makers, then consideration should be given to moving in the direction of learning communities which proffer the opportunity for a more inclusive approach to emerge out of internal school dynamics and conflict.

Much of the literature on the nature of participation describes parental participation as a somewhat separate or fragmented set of activities, rather than as an embedded approach which presumes empowerment. For participation to have benefits, activities need to be undertaken with the specific purpose of enabling parents to influence decision-making and bring about change. Participatory approaches will be more effective if embedded within a supportive organisational structure which avoids, or minimises, a tokenistic approach towards recognising parents as active and competent citizens. Successful examples within my data of parent-teacher partnerships which function as 'communities of practice' include accounts of practice which evoke a sense of shared storylines and activities (see Johnny P1/T1, Diane P7/T7, Conor P9/T9 and Michael P10/T10). It may be that, in the context of parents and teachers working together, the 'community of practice' is something to be worked towards developing rather than an adequate description of that which commonly exists. It may also be that the importance of this area of research lies not only in deciding whether parent-teacher relationships can be (re)configured as 'communities of practices' but also in better understanding the nature of the social groupings which exist when the 'community of practice' model is not applicable.

9.6 Limitations and suggestions for further research

My analysis of the data tends to support previous research findings that negative interactions, such as prevarication, reassurance and dismissive comments are part of a repertoire of strategies of defensive responses employed by some teachers towards parents (see Walker, 1993; Crozier, 1998a; MacLure and Walker, 1999). However, because this was not the main focus of the research, I remain unsure as to what extent these are deliberate ploys employed by teachers or whether, and if so to what degree, they represent ignorance on the part of teachers. Either, or both, have a heightened significance in relation to the duty of care ruling cited in the first chapter of this thesis. This is an important area for further enquiry because it impacts upon the professional training that schools might undertake to increase their understandings and management of parental

“concerns”, “special educational needs” and understandings of the duty of care. Equally important is training for teachers to help them manage the relational triangle of staff, parents and children within professional learning communities.

I have referred consistently throughout this thesis to parental agency although others have noted (Lareau, 1992; David et al., 1993; Reay, 1998) that mothers tend to be the chief mediators between home and school. I have done so because "parents" is often the preferred terminology in research and professional literature, although this is less true of the sociological research literature. There is a clear preponderance of mothers, rather than fathers, who have participated in the research described in this thesis. This at first tends to add support to the claim that the prime responsibility for “remediating” schooling lies with mothers. However this particular claim sits uneasily alongside my own experience and indeed this analysis. My professional engagement in the field cautions me about interpreting this as a straightforward confirmation of the gendered divisions of labour in parenting, although it may well be. At this juncture it is worth reiterating that I had no influence over the selection of participants, other, that is, than supplying the initial criteria (see section 4.6.1). I do not know, for example, whether those who initially acted as contacts for me, chose, for whatever reason, to speak to mothers in preference to fathers. Given the disparity between my own experience and accepted research, it may be the case that the division of labour in families where there is a child generating a “cause for concern” differs from the division of labour within families whose educational concerns and priorities are, perhaps, more straightforwardly described as mainly “achievement orientated”. Again, drawing on my experience rather than research findings, I know that many fathers who no longer reside in the family home do not automatically relinquish responsibility for their children's education (although reaching them for interviews may present logistical problems!). I also know that many fathers today experienced educational difficulties as children. This is to be expected given that many more boys than girls consistently present as giving “cause for concern”. It may well be that because certain areas of parenting, such as the writing of letters to schools, is frequently delegated to the mother, that there is confusion as to the degree of involvement of fathers in the educational endeavour. What is indisputable, however, is that the lack of the paternal voice

is a regrettable limitation of this research because it leaves unexplored the potential contributions of fathers to the establishing of professional learning communities.

The opportunistic nature of the sample did not lend itself to control for variations in age, socio-economic status and ethnicity, therefore any impact these factors might have upon the formation and maintenance (or otherwise) of 'communities of practice', are again, suggested, but not explored in any depth. The lack of systematic data on housing or parents' education means that the information gathered relating to parental occupation offers a useful but incomplete indicator of class, thus the social groupings attributed to the participating parents are "best guesses". The small, in-depth and intensive nature of the study makes limitations in effective sampling across social class groups inevitable. Although this masks the possible effects of the parents' social class background on their responses and actions, I have nevertheless assumed that the social groupings (see section 4.6.2) have consequences for the stocks of "appropriate" capital to which Bourdieu refers (see section 3.2.1). This is the most clearly evidenced, for example, in the account of Julia's mother (P8/T8, p.188) who both possesses and activates economic, social and cultural capital, but it is also evidenced across the other participants, who, by and large, are relatively well-positioned in relation to the stocks of "appropriate" capital which they can access and deploy in the field of education. Despite its limitations, my analysis nevertheless suggests that class-based cultural capital has an effect upon the formation, or otherwise of a 'community of practice' and is an area which would benefit from further research.

The small size of the parent and teacher sample and the criteria for selection of participants, whilst allowing me to pursue an in-depth dyadic approach to a particular set of relationships, places obvious limitations on its generalisability. A larger sample would doubtless reveal an infinite number of dyadic and triadic parent-teacher-child relationships each situated within and influenced by a continuum of motivational and contextual dimensions. Each of these would present further opportunities for increasing our understanding as to how the identities and needs of parents and children are constructed within the worlds they inhabit, and, equally, how the identities and needs of professionals are

constructed within the institutions in which they work. Arguably however the greatest limitation of this thesis is the lack of voice of the young people whose needs mediate the relationships under discussion. One solution to this might be to extend the research into a longitudinal project. This would overcome the ethical constraints I wrote about in detail in Chapter 4 whilst giving a voice to the children, albeit retrospectively, as young adults.

The limitations mentioned above form part of the 'highly complex set of issues and relationships between gender, ethnicity, social class, family culture and the positionings and responsiveness of individual school sites' (Vincent and Martin, 2002, p. 109) which encompass the 'nuances of social formation' (Vincent and Martin, p.112) and the degree to which parents are able to participate within schools. The limitations of this thesis arose from the constraints, and in particular the time constraints, which accompany the preparation of a PhD thesis. However, each limitation also represents a potentially fruitful area for further research.

9.7 Participation and inclusion

Given that the concepts of participation and inclusion are mutually defining, any exploration of partnership issues cannot be undertaken without referencing the inclusive school whose goal 'is not to leave anyone out' (Barton, 1997, p.233). Inclusion is not a mechanism for relocating educationally disadvantaged youngsters in mainstream rather than in special schools. Rather, as this thesis suggests, inclusion implies a whole school approach to social relations. Such an approach values equally the knowledge and contributions of parents, teachers and pupils.

Increasingly inclusion has become a 'global agenda' (Pijl, Meijer and Hegarty, 1997, cited in Ainscow, Booth and Dyson, 2006, p.295). A recent review of the literature on inclusive schools concludes that much of the literature is skewed towards reports of atypical schools seen to be 'particularly inclusive' only in terms of a narrow meaning of inclusion as concerned with students categorised as "having special educational needs" (Dyson, Howes and Roberts, 2004). There were few indications of the inclusive values elaborated by Booth (2005), namely concerns with the issues of equity, participation, rights, community, compassion, respect for diversity and sustainability (Booth, 2005a), and little to indicate a movement by

schools towards understanding inclusion and inclusive values as a 'principled way of viewing the development of education and society' (Ainscow, Booth and Dyson, 2006, p.297). There is, however, mounting evidence that 'the standards agenda narrowed and subverted the schools' commitment to inclusion' (Ainscow, Booth and Dyson, 2006, p.300). As the "standards agenda", intensified, so evidence of a growing "backlash" against inclusion amongst educationalists has started to become evident (see Warnock, 2005).

The literature on 'inclusion' draws on various Education Acts, government directives and SEN theory 'in an attempt to unpack what 'inclusive' really means' (Rogers, 2007, p. 66). For many parents however, "inclusive" education policy and directives are in direct conflict with how they 'experience this education process' (Rogers, 2007, p.66). Rogers concludes that "inclusion' into mainstream school is not simply about the placement of a child' (Rogers, 2007, p. 62) and that 'debates and discourses on inclusion/exclusion and wider sociological debates are crucial' (Rogers, 2007, p.65). Contradictions arising from education policy and provision often leave parents finding it difficult to negotiate the "official" education process. Little in-depth sociological research has 'focused on the wider social and emotional experiences' of parents and how their experiences link to those of 'education policy, provision and discourse' (Rogers, 2007, p. 66). Finally Rogers references the on-going debate about "social inclusion" and questions 'whether there is such a thing or not regarding both practitioners, parents and their children' (Rogers, 2007, p.66).

Busher argues that inclusion for parents and children 'seems to be at the price of conformity to particular socially derived norms of behaviour' (Busher, 2005, p.2). He draws upon a notion of utopianism (Halpin, 2003) to argue that what is constructed in schemas for success 'are as much wish-dreams that people work towards as statements of what is actually happening in schools' (Busher, 2005, p.2). Inclusive policies require schools to change their approaches, in particular, towards teaching staff roles and approaches to teaching and learning. Reculturing work means developing collaborative work cultures (Robinson and Carrington, 2002). The creation of a collaborative learning community requires the promotion of shared values and an appreciation of cooperatively working together whilst caring about each other. The members of such a community see

themselves and each other as communal resources and collectively see their value as delivery a high quality and appropriate education for the student. In terms of their practice, members utilise strengths and complement each other's knowledge and skills. Teachers assume the role of learners as well as teachers, and establish and develops links between theory and practice. 'An inclusive school culture engages teachers in collaborative forms of learning and is underpinned by democratic processes' (Robinson and Carrington, 2002, p.241). In an ideal 'community of practice' all members of the community are valued as equal active participants. They are empowered and held together by a common mission. The 'community of practice' provides opportunities to access information, dialogue with peers, collaborative and individual planning and reflection. It offers an enhanced knowledge and skill base. The collaborative process enables teachers to expand on repertoire of methods for teaching diverse needs, accommodating student diversity. It is a forum where both teachers and parents' voices can be heard and where a shared culture develops. Lasting school reform may result from 'communities' which are supported and developed from both inside and outside the school (Robinson and Carrington, 2002, p.241).

A concern with social justice requires us to raise questions about inclusion when inclusion is understood in terms of human rights and social equality. However, differing views on social justice 'may underline the apparent contradictions in the implementation of policies' (Lindsay, 2003, p.4). What is at issue is 'the interpretation and implementation of inclusion in practice' (Lindsay, 2003, p.10). The inclusive school has to be a democratic school in which all are empowered in the decision-making on which children's life chances may depend. Inclusion, as a whole school issue, means meeting the needs of each child, however defined, and considering and involving all members, including parents, as equal participants of one community. Inclusive education is about contributing to the removal of injustices. It is about a quest for the removal of policies and practices of exclusion and the realisation of effective participatory democracy (Barton, 1997, p.234). It is about 'the establishment and maintenance of a social world in which *all* people experience the realities of inclusive values and relationships' (Barton, 2003, p.11, original italics). The realisation of an inclusive society 'involves a political

critique of social values, priorities and the structures and institutions which they support. [...] It involves the politics of recognition and is concerned with the serious issue of who is included and who is excluded within education and society generally' (Barton, 2003, p.12). Inclusion 'involves putting together what is commonly kept apart and in moving forward on inclusion, some boundaries need to be crossed' (Booth, 2005b, p.2).

Disengagement from the dialogues of participation means quite simply that 'we will not learn about it' (Ballard, 2003, p.12), nor will we, as researchers and academics, accrue the benefits to be gained from scrutinising complicity in the ways in which closure of thinking occurs and about how truths are manufactured and knowledge produced.

Post-script

In the introduction to this thesis I described how the process of “Doing a Ph.D” immersed me in a wide range of academic discourses previously unknown to me, necessitating a sharp learning curve. The process was a recursive one in that my increasing understanding of academic texts was continually being measured against my daily work. I found some theories and philosophies sat uneasily alongside my own experiences whilst others resonated in a confirmatory way. Ultimately I have arrived

...at a new standard by which to measure intellectuals. I realised that a man’s (sic) intelligence is not the sum of what he knows but the soundness of his judgement of people and his power to understand and to help them (Yevtushenko, 1963, p.53).

I hope that this thesis, and the book which I intend to develop from the material included within it, will increase understandings and have the power to help people.

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Appendix 1. Abbreviations and writing conventions

A.D.D = Attention deficit disorder.

A.D.H.D =Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

A.S.D = Autistic spectrum disorder.

C.G.C = Child Guidance Centre.

E.B.D = Emotional and behavioural difficulties.

F = Father.

G.P = General practitioner.

H.I = Hearing impaired.

IEP =Individual Education Plan.

LEA = Local Education Authority.

LSA = learning support assistant.

M = Mother.

N.K = Not known.

Ofsted = Office for Standards in Education.

Parent = Parent or guardian.

P.E = Physical education.

PNEU = Parents National Education Union Schools.

PPS = Parent Partnership Services.

PPSs = Parent Partnership Schemes.

RSA = Royal Society of Arts.

SATs = Standard attainment targets.

SEN = Special Educational Needs.

SENCo = Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator.

SOC = Standard Occupational Classifications.

SPELD = Specific Learning Difficulties (Dyslexia).

Writing conventions

The following writing conventions are used throughout the text.

[...] Square brackets indicate sections of text omitted from the original quote or transcript.

Italics. Use of italics in the data chapters indicate transcript text.

“ Single speech marks indicate quotes from the literature.

Appendix 2. Introducing the children

Johnny

<u>Mother (P1)</u>	<u>Teacher (T1)</u>
<p>At the moment he's very confident, he's a bubbly, lively eight-year-old. He's a good couple of years under the rest of them in the class, and he really does struggle. But he tries, he's willing to give it a go. So, at the moment he's not aware of it, I don't think, but I think it is a struggle for him.</p> <p>What I'm worried about is that he's going to find that he's not with the others on that same level, and then his confidence is going to go all together.</p> <p>So, it's just holding him. I think he finds it hard. Um, but he hasn't once said, "I don't want to go to school today." So, I've still got him there, and I just don't want him to slip back and...and say, "Oh, I don't wanna go to school," and, "I'm sick," and all this, because you hear that so often.</p> <p>It's just spoon feeding him, constantly, with, say, if he's doing homework, I couldn't leave him to do it on his own. I mean, he'd just be lost. I have to sit there with him and guide him every step of the way, which, I mean, I don't mind, and I'm there for him, but, um, that is a worry... if he's got a piece of homework, he has to read it first to know what to do. And the reading is hard for him. Then sometimes after about a couple of minutes, he'll say, "What have I got to do?" So, his recalling the information back so I read it again. [...] Sometimes he just hasn't got a clue and I'll do it with him.</p>	<p>He just cannot process information. I will tell him to do something, give him a direction, and he will sit on his own, and sit there. Unless someone comes along and almost word by word helps him along... I've left him on his own to do things, and he's done something completely different.</p> <p>He has a positive attitude, he tries, I don't think he realises that he's so much further behind the rest of the class. He would be the weakest student in my class, definitely. Trouble processing language, trouble processing instructions, what to do, an order of events, putting a story down on paper, jumping from idea to idea, really poor Maths skills, memory is quite limited in terms of, like, recalling facts.</p> <p>Oh, I think it causes a big problem for him, because he doesn't know what's going on, and you can see him looking around for clues. He's become very resourceful in that, looking around at other kids, looking around for kids whispering answers. If someone blurts out an answer, he'll say that first answer that he hears, whether it's right or not....he'll put up his hand and then, "Oh, I, I forget. I don't remember". His needs don't even compare with the others in terms of, there is, I think, something actually there that's not being addressed. Like there is a problem with the reception, or the wiring or something. There's definitely a problem there.</p> <p>But, he does chew his sleeves. He shreds his clothes if he starts to get....</p>

Adam

<u>Mother (P2)</u>	<u>Teacher (T2)</u>
<p><i>Adam is extremely social, but he gets it all wrong, just doesn't know how to do it, when to do it and when not to do it. And he's very over the top, um, throughout, through everything.</i></p>	<p><i>He's a lovely little boy, there's a lot of likeable things about him. But in a classroom situation he can be quite difficult, is sometimes unsettled, and he can be distracting to others. - He cannot sit still for long periods of time at all. He gets very distracted, and then he distracts others.</i></p>
<p><i>He's got all the skills there, but doesn't know how to use them, and what to do. ...considerable difficulties, particularly sustained reading and concentration and comprehension. And anything that required sustained attention, he would have exceptional difficulties with it.</i></p>	<p><i>He's got behaviour difficulties, but he also struggles with some concepts of Maths; his Maths isn't that bad actually, but his English, his handwriting - he does not like to write at all. He will do anything to get out of writing. Sometimes he'll read really well, and then other times he'll swap letters over and all sorts of things. So, he has got problems with English and reading and writing, but his main problem's the behaviour, really. He's got ADHD and he's also at the lower end of Aspergers as well...not so severe.</i></p>

Judy

<u>Mother (P4)</u>	<u>Teacher(T4)</u>
<p><i>Bright and bubbly little girl, great swimmer, loves Brownies, very...normal little girl.</i></p> <p><i>Judy is keeping her head above water. She's still in the lowest part of the class, she still struggles, none of it comes easy to her. She did go through a stage in Year 2 of quite low morale in herself but she's since picked herself up again and she seems much more confident.</i></p>	<p><i>Nice girl...average ability in many respects ...let down by her spelling problem and definitely also concentration problems at times. Not very good student, for those reasons, because obviously you need to be attentive and write properly.</i></p>

Peter

<u>Mother (P5)</u>	<u>Teacher (T5)</u>
<i>Um, well as you know, Peter was ill when he was six and a half. Um, that was fine and he went back to school, and you obviously have to make allowances for somebody being that ill. He did progress but not at the extent that we expected him to progress. So...I just, I just had my suspicions, but I couldn't prove anything.</i>	<i>Yes, he was having difficulty learning to read...and reversing letters. And he was, he was anxious about it too and the anxiety was there. And he was falling behind other children. The pace was leaving him behind. It was acquired dyslexia from the illness, as far as I could gather.</i>

Alex

<u>Mother (P6)</u>	<u>Teacher (T6)</u>
<i>Handwriting difficult, still very untidy, although now very small. Work always very messy.</i>	<i>My first impression of Alex was 'How am I going to keep this child quiet'? He just loves to tell you things, but he just doesn't enjoy actually writing them down.</i>
<i>Alex makes up for his shortcomings in writing and spelling by being verbal and a bit of a comedian at times.</i>	<i>He's a bright bubbly boy. Lots and lots of oral participation, quite hard to shut up at times. Can be a little bit annoying because he does not like to stop talking. He likes to be centre of attention.</i>
<i>All his teachers have said he has a wonderful vocabulary, what he says is fantastic. [...] Wonderful words, wonderful ideas. Great imagination. Ask him to go write it on paper,, and</i>	<i>Definitely challenged educationally; he doesn't like doing things like writing, ...he didn't seem to enjoy things like that. But ...orally, he could tell you anything.</i>
<i>She (his teacher) appreciated him for who he was rather than trying to make him fit a mould. (She) didn't make him feel worthless, basically, she made him feel valued for the things he was good at, which were speaking and listening.'</i>	<i>Alex was...difficult, but him and I got on because I accepted the way he was and was very open to him, talking to him rather than writing things down. I did humour him quite a lot with his outspokenness.</i>
<i>So all he sees is that he finds the work difficult already, and he gets more homework than most people, and his sister, who is good at everything, who finds things easy, gets less.</i>	<i>It was his behavioural things that would slow him down, because he wouldn't concentrate, because he didn't want to do it.</i>

Chloe, Alan and Diane are all on the SEN register, for different reasons. Diane, the youngest, has medical problems, Alan (the middle child) has Specific Learning Difficulties, and Chloe (the eldest) has emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD).

Diane

<u>Mother (P7)</u>	<u>Teacher (T7)</u>
<p><i>I don't know why they think she's delayed actually. What we feel with Diane is, anything she does is good. We don't have any great expectations for Diane if she's happy...</i></p> <p><i>I've always thought anything she does is a bonus.</i></p> <p><i>With Diane she was so sick, we used to video her every day to make a diary of how she was and, you know, lots of children died of it when we were in the hospital, so we always count our blessings with Diane...every day she got better, we just count...I really do thank God for her, you know?</i></p> <p><i>So, it's a positive thing with Diane, anything she does...all I ask from any of my three children is whatever they do, they do well. Not to get academic results, but to do the best that they can do. I'm not asking for university degrees, that they're happy, they're courteous and kind and they're content. And I think that's all we ask for with Diane.</i></p>	<p><i>Mum said on several occasions, Diane was a very special baby because I think they feel they nearly lost her several times. Mum said "I'm not actually worried about her academically and how she gets...as long as she gets on okay, I'm not worried about her doing really well. I just want her to be happy and settled."</i></p> <p><i>We had to get around to the idea that we needed to do something about Diane's difficulties we couldn't just let her be happy and float through school. And that was quite difficult because Mum was saying "Well, she's really happy in this class", but we had to get it over, and we did, in the end and that was when we started working together [...] by her mum realising that...we were interested in her welfare generally, but also, being teachers we were interested in her educational side.</i></p>

Julia

<u>Mother (P8)</u>	<u>Teacher (T8)</u>
<p>(The LEA psychologist said) "One of her strategies of coping with perhaps not being able to follow instructions, or understanding the instructions and not being able to follow them, is by mimicking."</p> <p>The way I understand it, is that she needs lots of physical feedback, um, to know where she is..in space. Because it's so obvious that she can't, you know, her writing is so behind and her reading is so behind.</p>	<p>She's got dyspraxia so she's not very good with co-ordination and actually trying to order things. Occasionally she'll put up her hands and she'll be really enthusiastic: "But I know...." And then you ask a question and she's totally blank. She has got problems with...actually responding to instructions'.</p>

Conor

<u>Mother (P9)</u>	<u>Teacher (T9)</u>
<p>With handwriting (difficulties in writing and hence reading back, spelling weak), using a knife and fork (difficult, messy hence frequently uses his fingers), keyboard skills (slow, two fingers maximum), Extremely tight muscles in feet and lower legs</p> <p>Number bonding/times tables (short memory retention),</p> <p>It was out of kilter with the rest of his development, his reading was fine, his interest in history, geography, everything around him was marked.</p> <p>Periodic problems with self-esteem and coping strategies.</p>	<p>Immense difficulties. They were quite profound and they were quite different from everybody else. [...]</p> <p>Motor control (gross/fine) difficulties.</p> <p>Maths was a subject where he did have a block which sort of exacerbated his problems. Not only did he have difficulties recording his Maths work, he found mental work, mental strategies particularly difficult.</p> <p>He was articulate, he was imaginative, he had a fantastic general knowledge. A highly intelligent boy, but obviously had great difficulties recording any of his work.</p> <p>He had severe motor control problems and that obviously caused him an awful lot of frustration.</p>

Michael and Melanie

<u>Michael</u>	<u>Melanie</u>
<i>Michael doesn't give a monkey's who he pleases and who he doesn't, he sees life very black and white. Something is right or it is wrong.</i>	<i>If she could live in a grey area all her life, and please everybody all of the time, she would.</i>
<i>Michael...was very defensive, he'd hit out when he was frustrated. Now, as his reading has come on and he can access things, he's come to terms with the fact that he's not thick and he's not stupid. As he's coming over that problem he's done the opposite, he's calmed down, he's become quieter, he's taken up more activities, more sports, and he's...sort of come down a level, whereas Melanie's gone up in confidence.</i>	<i>In Melanie it reflected that she would not try anything else in any other area of her life because she felt a failure where she was at school and she felt different to everybody else. When her reading started coming together, and she could access the information by herself, she started socialising, and her whole personality evolved. She's more confident. So it's not just the reading, it affects the whole personality.</i>

Michael

<u>Mother (P10)</u>	<u>Teacher (T10)</u>
<i>I always just thought of him as a child who had the potential of doing lots. I thought he had a very, very strong personality, which given what he's had to put up with, is actually probably a very good thing</i>	<i>I really think that if he hadn't been a naughty boy, he could have quite easily just coasted through. I'm glad he's got the character he's got, in a lot of ways that personality pushed him to the forefront of 'Hang-on, this kid's got a problem, what we gonna do about it?'</i>
<i>From day one she never thought of Michael as a problem child. She always thought of him as a child with a learning difficulty that could be overcome.</i>	<i>It is my forte to work with more challenging children, that's just the sort of teacher I am. I loved working with Michael.</i>
<i>If they hit senior school and they are too far behind, they give up. They don't wanna know anymore, there's too much of a gap for them to catch up with.</i>	<i>We both knew the way forward for Michael was to be Statemented, because he had such a positive attitude to my teaching, I thought 'If that goes, he's had it for the rest of his school life.'</i>

Appendix 3. Introductory letter and questionnaire for parents

Dear Parents,

I am researching the ways in which teachers and parents work together, or otherwise, in sorting out children's problems and difficulties. I am contacting parents who had concerns about their child and gathered information for themselves outside of the school. This may have been from, for example, voluntary associations, TV, books, newspapers, the Internet, private assessment, or other people. What happened when you passed this on to the school? Did the relationship between you and the school change? I want to know how you, as a parent, experienced sorting out your child's difficulties. I am interested in finding out, for example, how you saw your role as a parent, what sort of contribution you think you made, and whether you felt it was appreciated, valued or used by your child's teacher.

Please answer the following questions before the interview. Your answers will give me background information which will remain entirely confidential. Thank you for your time and help.

Your name:

Your address, and/or contact telephone number:

What is your child's name?

How old is he/she?

Which year is he/she in at school? (i.e. Year 3).

What school does he/she attend?

Has he/she changed schools?

Is so, when and why?

How would you describe your child's difficulties?

How long have you been concerned about him/her?

Which people have you had contact with in relation to your child's problems? (e.g. the class teacher(s), class room assistants or support teachers, the SENCo, the head teacher, the School Governor responsible for Special Needs, the Educational Psychologist, Borough co-ordinator for Special Educational Needs, or anybody else).

What is your occupation?

What is your husband/wife/partner's occupation (if applicable)?

Any other information that you want to give me.

The research involves the sensitive interviewing of both parents and teachers of individual children who have been giving cause for concern. All the interviews are entirely confidential. All names will be deleted and all schools have been given coded names to avoid their identification. It is not my intention to make judgements about individual schools, teachers or parents, or to act as a channel for feedback between teachers and parents. The interviews are tape-recorded and you will have the opportunity to read the transcripts and make any alterations or further comments. I will not use any of the interview material without your informed consent.

My hope is that the research will make an informed contribution in the field of Special Education Needs which will benefit all teachers, parents and children. If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me. Thank you, in advance, for your time and co-operation.

Appendix 4. The interview schedule for parents

Perhaps we could start by you telling me why and when you first became concerned about Tell me about(because I don't know him/her), how would you describe him/her?.

At some point, you made a decision while your child was in primary school to seek some additional help outside of the school. Can you tell me how you came to make this decision? (Specific triggers? People or events).

Where did you look for help and advice? (e.g. books, Internet, other people).

What sort of help were you looking for? (i.e. support, information, assessment, teaching?) (Why?).

What kind of help did you get?

Did you pass on, or share what you gained from this with your child's school? (If yes, to whom?).

If not, why not?

If you did, to what extent do you feel that the teacher (s) valued your contribution, and how would you describe the response? (Adjectives?).

Nowadays, there is a lot of discussion about 'partnership' between parents and teachers, especially with reference to children with Special Educational Needs. What would your ideal model of parent/teacher partnership look like? (mutual exchange of information? Involving the children?).

How would you describe the relationship between yourself, as a parent, and the teachers you came into contact with? (Or other professionals).

Did you notice, and can you describe, any changes in the relationship between yourself and your child's teacher? (There may have been several).

Thinking back, can you describe any differences in the way that you viewed your child's difficulties compared to the way in which you felt his teachers viewed his

problems? Why do you think that was? (School processes and procedures, e.g. tests or SATS).

Can you describe how you came to understand and deal with your child's difficulties? (What or who in particular was helpful).

Do you think that you have been successful in sorting out your child's difficulties? (Criteria for success, from whose viewpoint?).

If you were asked to give advice or support to other parents who found themselves in a similar situation, what might you say?

Do you have any thoughts or comments to make about this interview? (In hindsight, do you view things differently?).

Appendix 5. Introductory letter and questionnaire for teachers

For my Doctoral thesis at the Institute of Education, I am researching the ways in which teachers and parents work together, or otherwise, in sorting out children's problems and difficulties. I am contacting parents who had concerns about their child and gathered information for themselves outside of the school. This may have been from, for example, voluntary associations, TV, books, newspapers, the Internet, private assessment, or other people. What happened when this information or advice was passed on to the school? Did the relationship between you and the parents change? . I am interested in finding out how, for example, you saw your role as a teacher, what sort of contribution you think you made, and whether you felt it was appreciated and valued by the child's parents. How did you, as a class teacher experience and respond to this kind of parental intervention and did you find it helpful or otherwise?

Broadly speaking, the questions I would like to ask you fall into the following groups:

What informs your evaluation and understanding of children's difficulties in school?

The differences and similarities in the ways in which parents and teachers view children's difficulties.

If and how inputs of information from various sources affect your practice.

Parent/teacher relationships

The research involves the sensitive interviewing of both parents and teachers of individual children who have been giving cause for concern. All the interviews are entirely confidential. All names will be deleted and all schools have been given coded names to avoid their identification. It is not my intention to make judgements about individual schools, teachers or parents, or to act as a channel for feedback between teachers and parents. The interviews are tape-recorded and you will have the opportunity to read the transcripts and make any

alterations or further comments. I will not use any of the interview material without your informed consent.

My hope is that the research will make an informed contribution in the field of Special Education Needs which will benefit all teachers, parents and children. If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me. Thank you, in advance, for your time and co-operation.

Please answer the following questions before the interview. Your answers will give me background information which will remain entirely confidential. Thank you for your time and help.

Your name:

Your address, and/or contact telephone number:

The name and telephone number of the school where you work:

How long have you been teaching?

What specific training have you had in Special Educational Needs?

What year was (name) in when you taught him/her?

How would you describe his/her difficulties?

How long had you been concerned about him/her?

Which people did you come into contact with in relation to (name)'s problems? (E.g. other class teachers, class room assistants, support teachers, the SENCo, the head teacher, the Educational Psychologist, Borough co-ordinator for Special Educational Needs, or anybody else).

Is there any other information that you want to give me, or think would be useful?

Appendix 6. The Interview schedule for teachers

It's now (1,2,3) years since you taught (name). I'd like to take you back and ask you how you remember him/her?.....

What was your initial evaluation of (name)?

What was this based on? (Observation, SATS, previous reports etc.)

Did you feel that (name) had any kind of difficulties? If yes, how would you describe (name)'s difficulties?

How did you view (name)'s difficulties in relation to other children in the class?

What kind of information, if any, was (name)'s mother able to give you?

Were you able to use this information in any way? If yes, how? (For other children?)

Did the information that (name)'s mother give you result in you changing your view of his/her difficulties?

Did it in any way alter the way you taught him/her? (How, why)

Do you think that your professional view of (name)'s difficulties differed in any way to that of (name)'s mother? If so, how?

How would you describe your relationship with (name)'s mother?

Did your relationship with (name)'s mother alter over time? If yes, how?

How successful do you feel that you were in understanding and sorting out (name)'s difficulties in school? (Criteria for success, from whose viewpoint?).

How do you measure or evaluate this?

Nowadays, there is a lot of discussion about 'partnership' between parents and teachers, especially with reference to children with special educational needs. What would your ideal model of parent/teacher partnership look like? (Mutual exchange of information? Involving the children?).

How do you view 'parental knowledge' in relation to 'professional knowledge'?

Can you describe any ways in which you think they are similar or different?

What value generally do you place on the information that parents offer?

What contribution do you think parents can/should make if their child is experiencing difficulties?

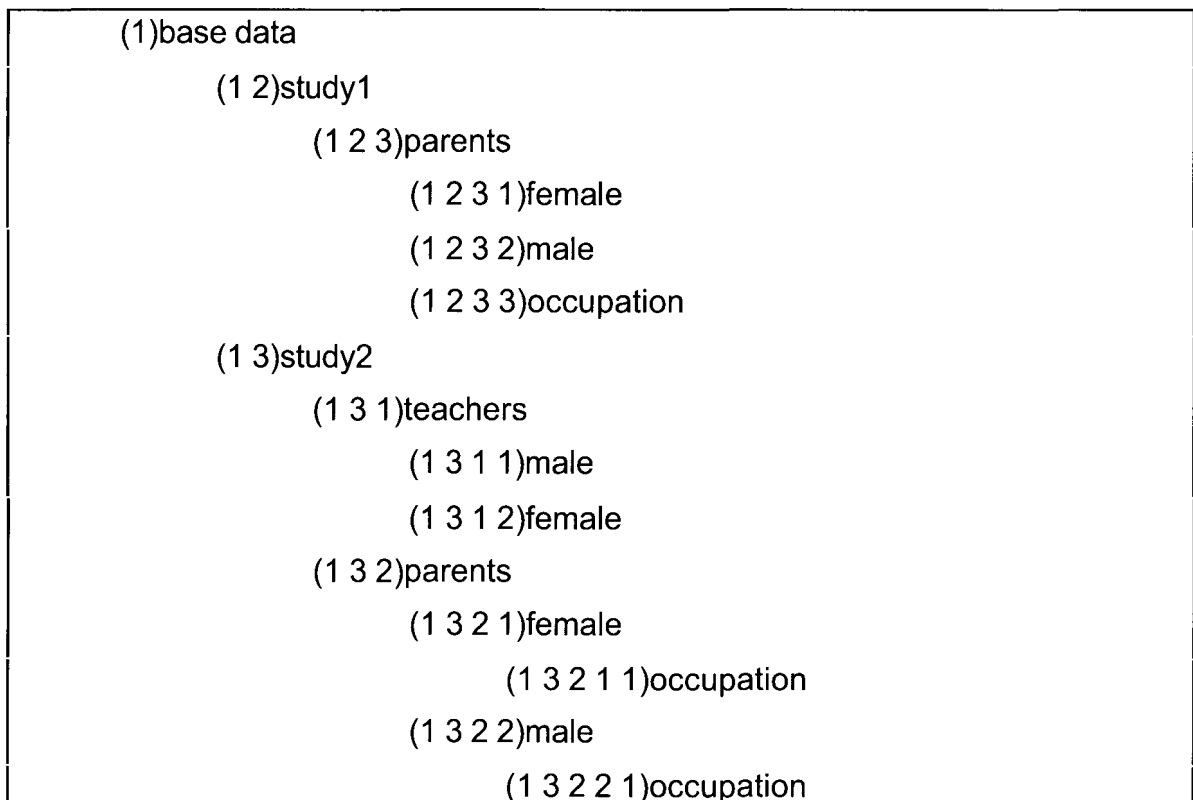
What, for you as a class teacher, are the most valuable sources of information regarding children with special needs, or those giving cause for concern? (Other teachers, SENCo, parents, Internet etc).

Do you have any further thoughts or comments to make about this interview?

Appendix 7. The node tree

I have reproduced sections of the node index tree which demonstrate my growing conceptualisation of the dynamic relationship between interactions and the factors which impact upon them. I have included three sets of extracts from the node tree. The first shows the base data nodes (1) and the second, some of the nodes created during my analysis of the preliminary study. The third section, nodes (6) to (12), evolved during my coding of the Main Study data. Data coded at these nodes helped me to test my growing awareness of the potential significance of the 'community of practice' theory to my thesis.

Example 1. The Index Tree (Base data)



Example 2. The Index Tree (Section of preliminary study nodes)

- (2)Study1 parents only
 - (2 1)summary
 - (2 2)descriptors
 - (2 3)concerns
 - (2 3 1)teachers concerns
 - (2 3 10)why/what help sought?
 - (2 4)souces of information
 - (2 4 1)sort of help received
 - (2 5)use of information
 - (2 5 1)advice to others
 - (2 6)actions taken
 - (2 6 1)teacher response
 - (2 6 1 1)changes in relationship
 - (2 6 2)expectations
 - (2 6 2 1)constraints upon teachers
 - (2 7)ideal partnership model
 - (2 7 1)personal experiences
 - (2 7 2)professionalism
 - (2 7 3)communication
 - (2 8)role
 - (2 8 1)criteria for success
 - (2 8 2)parents feelings
 - (2 9)positioning

Example 3. The Index Tree (Section of Main Study nodes)

- (6)collectivities
 - (6 1)tension/conflict with institutions, ie parent or teacher and school
 - (6 2)relationship to institution
 - (6 3)mechanism of cohesion
- (7)'community of practice'
 - (7 1)shared repertoire
 - (7 2)mutual engagement
 - (7 3)Joint enterprise
 - (7 4)negotiated, shared theories
 - (7 5)constraints, opportunities etc.
 - (7 6)emergent knowledgeability
 - (7 7)site of information
 - (7 8)Practice
 - (7 8 1)structure
 - (7 8 2)content
 - (7 8 3)ignorance
 - (7 9)participation
 - (7 9 1)collaboration
 - (7 9 2)relations
 - (7 9 2 1)transformative
 - (7 9 3)lived experience
 - (7 10)identity
 - (7 10 1)new IDs forged
 - (7 10 2)generalisations
 - (7 10 3)memories
 - (7 11)'identity of participation'
 - (7 11 1)identity of non-participation
 - (7 11 2)marginality
 - (7 11 3)peripherality
 - (7 12)power
 - (7 12 1)power + dependence
 - (7 12 2)rebellion
 - (7 12 4)(dis)empowering

Example 3 (cont'd). The Index Tree (Section of Main Study nodes)

(7 12 3)	alignment
(7 12 5)	shared/contested
(7 12 6)	privilege
(7 12 7)	knowledge as power
(7 13)	nexus
(7 13 1)	multiple 'communities'
(7 14)	membership
(7 14 1)	multimembership
(7 15)	Boundaries
(7 15 1)	mechanisms to exclude
(7 15 2)	transgression
(7 15 3)	barriers to participation
(7 16)	Learning
(7 16 1)	competence & experience
(7 16 2)	individual/collective
(7 16 3)	Beliefs
(7 17)	'Knowing'
(7 18)	Meaning making
(8)	description of child
(8 1)	history
(9)	ideal model of partnership
(10)	Advice to others
(11)	SATS
(12)	comments on interview

N5 allows only for a very limited description of the content of each node. The descriptions facilitate the process of selecting which node might be an appropriate placement for a data extract. My final example, example 4 below, shows my node descriptions for the 'community of practice' node, (node 7). Although effectively written in shorthand because of the limitations imposed by the software, the descriptions were accompanied, where necessary, by more elaborate Memos.

Example 4. Node descriptions

Node Address	Node Title	Node Description
(7)	"Community of practice"	Learning in context of lived experience of participation, mutual engagement as source of coherence, joint enterprise, mutuality
(7.1)	Shared repertoire	Collective development of shared practice, joint language. Coherence of meaning, resources created for negotiating meaning, vicarious experience
(7.2)	Mutual engagement	What is done together, shared vision, active subjects, DOING, response to actions of others, mutuality as basis for identity of participation
(7.3)	Joint enterprise	Sustained pursuit of shared enterprise, collective development of shared practice, shared vision, duality, interconnectedness
(7.4)	Negotiated, shared theories	Theories, ambiguities, assumptions, perspectives, ways of understanding developed, negotiated and shared
(7.5)	Constraints, opportunities etc.	Opportunities, obstacles, resources, constraints within a Community of practice
(7.6)	Emergent knowledgeability	Accumulation of skills/ information, combination of knowledges which inform each other
(7.7)	Site of information	Dissemination, interpretation, use of information, communication, acquisition and creation of knowledge
(7.8)	Practice	As source of cohesion or not? Shared learning, shared repertoire becomes part of practice
(7.8.1)	Structure	Things done, artifacts produced
(7.8.2)	Content	Relationships worked out, situations interpreted, conflicts resolved, productive enterprise, divergent meanings and perspectives negotiated
(7.8.3)	Ignorance	Practice includes ignorance due to lack of time, energy or active principle. Resistance to knowledge, passion for ignorance
(7.9)	Participation	Both action and belonging. Social and personal. Doing, talking, thinking, feeling, belonging

Example 4 (cont'd). Node descriptions

(7.9.1)	Collaboration	Participation or collaboration?
(7.9.2)	Relations	Conflictual, harmonious, competitive, co-operative
(7.9.2.1)	Transformative	Transformative both ways, tensions, conflict, transgression, rejecting limits, challenging identity
(7.9.3)	Participation	Lived experience of participation in community of practice = identity
(7.10)	Identity	Constantly becoming, ongoing, social formation of person, new identities forged from new perspectives. Community of practice as locus of negotiation of identity
(7.10.1)	New identities forged	New IDs-unsettling, demanding, encouraging, 'Competent participant', 'outsider'? New ID found as 'newcomer' thru' participation
(7.10.2)	Generalisations	Stereotypes
(7.10.3)	Memories	Personal references, memories and experiences
(7.11)	'Identity of participation'	Meaningful, belonging, mutual process of negotiation of meaning, able to shape practice, well-being. Being part of whole, ID of competence
(7.11.1)	'Identity of non-participation'	Experience of non-participation = ID of non-participation
(7.11.2)	Marginality	Non-participation as marginality, preventing full participation, restricted
(7.11.3)	Peripherality	Non-participation as peripherality. Casual but legit access to practice without full membership. Ambiguity of position
(7.12)	Power	Different forms of power – interact, create spaces of resistance
(7.12.1)	Power +dependence	Mix of power and dependence
(7.12.2)	Rebellion	Revealing greater commitment than passive conformity. resistance
(7.12.3)	Alignment	As unquestioning allegiance
(7.12.4)	(Dis)empowering	Disempowerment, prescriptive, conflicting interests, bids for ownership, control

Example 4 (cont'd). Node descriptions

(7.12.5)	Shared/contested	Tension between the two. Territory claiming, defining what matters. Passive objects of professional knowledge
(7.12.6)	Privilege	Privileging certain perspectives and knowledgeability. Hierarchical surveillance. Subjective, judgmental views. Defining success/failure. Status
(7.12.7)	Knowledge as power	Knowledge about needs as instruments of power
(7.13)	Nexus	Nexus/constellations. A community of practice or constellations of communities of practice?
(7.13.1)	Multiple communities	Community of practice not self-contained. Broader context. Participation in multiple communities of practices. Differentiated, interlocked membership
(7.14)	Membership	Markers of membership. Mutual engagement or aggregate of people defined by characteristics or categories
(7.14.1)	Multimembership	Individual m/ship of other communities of practice. contributes to identity, different practices, behaviour and perspectives. Source of learning, bridges, brokers
(7.15)	Boundaries	Complex landscape of boundaries and peripheries. Explicit or otherwise markers, movement across boundaries. Creates bonds or separation, selfmade
(7.15.1)	Mechanisms to exclude	Labels, gate-keeping, coercive markers. Tensions
(7.15.2)	Transgression	Challenging imposed boundaries
(7.15.3)	Barriers to participation	Indicates status of 'outsider' e.g. language, jargon
(7.16)	Learning	Social participation located in centre of lived experience. Cultural resources produced? Characteristics of practice
(7.16.1)	Competence and experience	Competence driving expertise or reverse. Experience outside of community of practice included. New elements and knowledge created? Interplay of competence and experience, or choice between them? 2 way process

Example 4 (cont'd). Node descriptions

(7.16.2)	Individual/collective	Individual or collective learning, new understandings, reached thru' negotiation not authority
(7.16.3)	Beliefs	Personal philosophies and beliefs
(7.17)	'Knowing'	Acknowledged as partial? Vicarious. As a resource or limitation. Match between knowing and learning
(7.18)	Meaning making	How people produce meanings, give meanings to their actions. Experience carried from one context to another.

